

Sermon August 31, 2025

Leader:

Today, we have before us bookbags to be carried to and from school by the children and youth gathered here.

These bookbags will contain work to be done, work that's completed and returned, books to study, tools to complete homework. Notebooks, pencils, pens, protractors, compasses, crayons, rules, scissors, glue sticks and other items used for school work will find their way in and out of these backpacks.

Some days, so much stuff will fill these bookbags that the student may find it difficult to walk. Other days, they will be light and nearly empty. But on each and every day, these bookbags represent work required of the students gathered here. And, as in every aspect of our life, we bring these before God for blessing at this time.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we lift to you today, these students.

They stand here ready to receive your blessings and they commit themselves to study and learning in the school year ahead. We ask your blessing on each of the And we ask your blessing on these bags. They will hold the school work of each student and will be carried from home to school and back again. As these students carry these backpacks, may they remember the love and care of this congregation that surrounds them each school day.

We pray for the teachers and administrators in our schools. Sustain them with your blessing. May they know that this congregation embraces their call to teaching and learning and surrounds them with love and care as well.

We pray in the name of Jesus who we seek to follow day by day. Amen.

Today's Gospel includes Jesus' teachings on humility and hospitality, using the example of a wedding banquet. Luke 14: 1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

God's Promises

The author of Hebrews tells us to "let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Today we are called to offer radical hospitality... and extravagant welcome to everyone we meet. We are called to widen our circle; to see one another as God sees them: a vital and beloved part of our community. Sometimes it is easy... sometimes we need to face our own prejudices or fears, so we truly can see the spark of Christ's light in their eyes.

This week, we lost 2 beautiful children (and many more were critically injured) as they began a new school year. Perhaps they were carrying a book bags that were blessed by a congregation that loved them. They were shot as they prayed in a sanctuary... bullets raining through stained glass

windows. A place of safety and refuge was altered forever in a moment of horrific violence. I think of Ms. Shirley who once said this sanctuary is a place of peace and safety. We come here to be closer to God.

But, sanctuaries are not just a place we go to... a place set aside for worship and prayer. A place that can be damaged by the hatred of others. We are called to be the sanctuaries... to offer safety and refuge to all of God's children.

To **be a sanctuary**, means we become the place of safety and refuge. We find true peace wherever we are in life's journey, because Jesus breathed it into each of us through the Spirit.

Who do we know who needs a place of sanctuary... a place that we embody as members of the Body of Christ? Who needs a glimpse of true welcome... who has been denied this glimpse because they feel judged or alone?

As we lean into our faith, remember that we are not alone. I hope that from time to time, you hear the sound of God's sweet voice whispering in your ear: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

That's what we need to remember most... to put our trust God... the One who created the universe and every creature that lives upon this earth... from the teeny tiny ants in your kitchen to the great big lions in the forest to each and every one of you. And when you get right down to it, when we let go of the things that we think are so important, we will find once again, that it only God who holds life... only God who matters. And God's are clear. When everything else is gone, there is still God's sweet voice whispering in your ear: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

In today's passage from Hebrews, God's promise to not forsake us is linked directly to our attachment to stuff. "Be content with what you have," the writer tells us, because our focus should be on attaching ourselves to God... not our things. To put our trust in God. To become a sanctuary.

The Israelites learned this lesson in the Wilderness. When They were hungry, God provided them manna... each and every day, until the day they reached the Promised Land. God supplied what they needed for each day, but if they took too much.. if they hoarded it... they soon discovered that it wouldn't

last. The un-used manna would just rot... but there would always be more the next day. God always gave them exactly what they needed.

"I will never leave you," God whispered in their ears, I will never forsake you. Put your trust in me."

The Bible is full of people just like that, just like the Israelites: the fool who kept building bigger barns to store all of his stuff; Saul, who became Paul; people who trusted things, more than they trusted God. They were convinced that they had life figured out, only to learn too late that God is the one who is in charge

And we do the very same thing. We accumulate stuff at an incredible rate. So fast, we can't keep up with all the stuff-no room for it all. Possessions mean so much to us.

And it's not just at home. It's at church too. One thing I know about you... you love this church. You love the windows, you love the bells, you love the organ, you love the memories that are embedded in each pew and each wall hanging. And many of you are scared that the day will come when this building will be obsolete. It's easy, I think, to look back and remember and desperately try to hold onto a past that no longer exists, only to find that it is rotting like day old manna. It is time to go out and gather a new harvest and trust that it is good, even if it looks and feels and tastes different than it ever did before.

I understand those fears, but I hope that you will move forward in a new direction. Instead of looking back at a rosy past, try to envision a future... knowing it is a future that will include the One who brought us this far. And remember this: no matter what the future holds, the church is more than this building... it is more than the organ or the windows or the bells or all of the stuff that has accumulated over the generations. The church is the people and is found wherever 2 or 3 are gathered together. When I look at you, I see so much potential and so many gifts, I just wish you could see the same in yourselves. Because the church... the very Body of Christ depends on each of you to be a sanctuary.

As we move forward into the coming week, here are a few things for each of you to ponder:

- *Are we the sanctuaries Jesus calls us to be?*
- *Do we love as freely as Jesus does?*
- *What can we do to bring our own sanctuaries outside these doors so that we can greet those who need to experience an extravagant welcome?*
- *Do we make room at the table for all sinners, the disenfranchised and outcasts... without condemnation or an expectation that they will change to fit in better?*
- *Or are we hoarding what we have, trying desperately to hold on to our possessions... forgetting that the only thing we truly possess is the love of one another and our God*
- *What can each of us do today to change our own story - so that we can be the one who offers peace, refuge and safety to all those who need a glimpse of God's love.*

Today is the day to trust in the promises of God and build yourself up as a true sanctuary. Trust in a world that puts its trust in God because of people just like you. Trust in that voice, no matter how quiet it may be. "I'm here... you are not alone... I will not forsake you..."

Trust God and God alone. And you never know what God has in store for each of you... for this community... for this world. May it be so. Amen.