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Trinity Episcopal Church

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When reading today's lessons, you can't help but recall that not too long ago Harold Camping told us the world was going to come to an end, or at least begin to come to an end on May 21st. And many of you may remember, even Father Matthew mentioned on May 22nd that we are still here. The reason I mention this incident is to take heed of what scripture says about prophets. These readings specifically mention that the prophets of doom and gloom we are to be wary of. Jeremiah says that the prophet that speaks of God's love and peace is the true prophet. "As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

From a Biblical and Christian perspective, that prophetic call was fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus did not point to our everyday struggle by pointing out that we, sinners that we are, have created this chaos. Instead, he focused on living a life in good relationship with God. He did not condemn those whose lives were not perfect by threatening them, instead he tells the woman at the well, go and sin no more. When his disciples just don't get it, he tries again and

again to explain the loving relationship God has with his creation, rather than fall into the role of judge in deciding who will sit at his right hand, or who is the best disciple. He doesn't mock Thomas for his lack of faith, but rather offers up his wounds for him to see and touch if necessary. He does not condemn us into joining and participating in the kingdom of God, but rather loves us into its presence. Through his love he lifts those he encounters up to experience God, and the wonder of God's kingdom that awaits them both now and in the future.

Would Harold Camping have been a better prophet if he "loved us" into his idea of judgment day? Would it have served a better purpose for those of us confronted with his message to have heard, "God loves you and is working for a purpose we don't understand, therefore, turn to God, experience his love and reflect it in your lives, pray for peace, and act as if it is already occurring." I wonder what the world, or at least the world that heard this kind of message would have done? What if those millions of dollars were spent loving and welcoming those who need to hear God's message, instead of threatening and condemning them.

Throughout history we have seen prophets of peace and love. Unfortunately, the life of discipleship comes with a cost. When Martin Luther King had a dream, he was prophesizing a world of justice, the same for Mahatma Ghandi. Mother Teresa spent her

whole life feeding and nurturing with love and compassion. Being satisfied to be paid in smiles and patient enough to watch the world change very slowly. I believe this is the discipleship that Jesus speaks of. These lives speak volumes of welcoming others, and in turn welcoming and honoring God through their actions.

The Gospel of Matthew was written at a time, when for the most part, the world and the people in it, are very similar to today. Maybe not with Skyping, mass transit, or technology, but the world still contained the same problems: good things happening to bad people, bad things happened to good people, there were corrupt government officials, poor and oppressed people struggling to survive, and injustice happening daily. (Sounds like this morning's newspaper.) Stephen Westerholm, a Biblical scholar, says that "The mission of Jesus is to reclaim the world for Goodness by goodness. Love can only triumph through love. All the powers of Goodness are at his disposal and they exceed by far the forces of evil...Jesus invites all to share in God's kingdom but he pressures no one." As for those of us who have accepted his message of love, this whole chapter of Matthew is a teaching tool on discipleship.

The beginning of chapter 10, which was not in today's reading, has Jesus summoning his twelve disciples and giving them

authority over unclean spirits and the ability to heal disease and sickness. Jesus then sends them out explaining that they should receive nothing for their services as they proclaim the good news and heal those who come to them. Like sheep among the wolves he reminds the disciples that theirs is not an easy task. As Christians, ours is not an easy task. But God is with us, and aware of our every need, the hair on our head is counted and God knows of each sparrow that falls.

But what of those who are not the best disciples? Whose nerves fray at using the word evangelism? Jesus gives us a better word, welcome. This small passage contains the word welcome six times. Welcome/ Hospitality. He reminds us that even giving a cup of cold water to a little one in the name of a disciple is carrying out Jesus' mission. Douglas Hare, in his commentary on Matthew, reminds us that the phrase "little one" in Jesus' description is representative of those meek in the spirit. Even those who are meek in the spirit, too nervous or inexperienced to preach, teach, or evangelize can participate as a disciple. Every Christian is called to participate in bringing the kingdom of God forward through their actions, even if the only thing they can do is offer hospitality and a cup of water to someone in need. That cup of water, like a drop in a large lake, will send ripples out beyond our expectations. Most of us have experienced the ripples others send out either for good or

for bad. Sometimes the originator of the ripple is totally unaware of the effect they can have on others.

Trinity's youth have been on a mission trip hoping to be welcomed. Their trip was to widen their experience of the world, and be representative of Jesus' message, not just in words, but in action. I am sure they not only welcomed those they met on the journey, but experienced hospitality as well. I look forward to the coming weeks when these young missionaries get a chance to tell their stories. A chance to share how they created a ripple of hospitality that can continue to reach others.

Trinity amazes me with the way everyone is working together to better the church, the community, and the world. Trinity is good at sending out those ripples in the water without expectation or full realization of whose lives they will touch. And I believe we all do this, as Paul reminds us in his letter, because we are under grace.

The challenge for us then is to continue to spread the Gospel, and as the saying goes, "use words if necessary." But more than words, continue to use your heart. As we embark on a summer of graduations, adventures, vacations, gatherings, beginnings, and endings, call on God to open your heart for strength, "Rejoice daily in His name," and welcome with love all those you encounter and experience.

Maybe Mr. Camping's signs should have read, Kingdom of God coming, He would love to welcome you. That probably would have been money better spent.