

John Sampson
"Plenty Good Room"
Text: Matthew 22:1 - 14
Preached at KVCC
October 15, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN.

I name all of my sermons based on a word or phrase from the text we are reading for the week, or an image that I think brings out the underlying theme I will share with all of you.

This week's sermon title is actually the title of hymn: Plenty Good Room. I'm not sure if you all know it, but I'll sing the first part for you.

“plenty good room

plenty good room

good room in my father’s kingdom

plenty good room

plenty good room

just choose your seat and sit down!”

What I love about this hymn is it’s openness, it’s image of God’s invitation to come into communion with the Divine, and with one another, as being limitless and gracious. The doors of celebration are thrown open and we are all invited to join the party. What’s more, we get to choose our own seats, unlike many weddings I’ve part of where I’m relegated to a table with people I don’t know, and don’t especially click with. You know what I’m talking about. We’ve all had the experience at some point of being assigned to Table 14, in the back, away from the dance floor, with a bunch of “distant relatives” ...

But at God's wedding party she doesn't micromanage the seating chart, and she doesn't care if we really even know the groom, the one who is called God's Son, the man named Jesus. Just come! The party is ready.

Today we welcome four new members into the life of this church.

We welcome:

Kate Comegys Mongulla

Shawn LaMarche

Emily Martz

Debby Rice

And I say to each of our new members welcome. There's "plenty good room" here at Keene Valley Congregational Church, "just choose your seat and sit down." And you have already chosen your

seats in this community. You've chosen your seat of song and music; You've chosen your seat of being part of task forces and showing up to support and serve our neighbors in their need. You've chosen your seat here at KVCC, not as the first step in your spiritual journeys, but as your current stop on the road that God is calling you to travel through your lives.

Today as we welcome our new members I also invite each one of you who are already members of this church, either on the books, or in your hearts and in your actions, to take just a moment to think about the seat you have chosen for yourselves in this community.

Each seat is different; no two seats are the same. How have you lived out the message of Jesus in your life? What is the ministry you have been called to and accepted? There are so many ministries present in this room. Teaching children in the local school.

Introducing yourself to a man who you have never met, but who has just lost his wife and checking in to see he has enough to eat.

Writing letters to those in solitary confinement so that they will know they are not invisible and forgotten.

See how many seats there are in God's realm. And there is always room for more.

I think I gravitated towards wrapping this sermon's message around a hymn because I felt that our reading today was a bit sharp. Here we have Jesus telling us a parable of a wedding gone wrong. First the actual guests never show up. They're too busy. Their kids have a soccer game. They're away on vacation. They've got a product launch at work. Invitation after invitation is sent back with regrets. And the father of the groom is really, really angry...to say the least. And desperate. So desperate that he invites complete strangers to the reception.

Imagine it. You're the father of the groom, or even the groom. And you come into the banquet hall and you...recognize...no...one. Not one person. It's your special day and you're celebrating it with people you've never met before in your life! Then, as you scan the room, you see a guy who's not wearing a tie, or maybe he's wearing white after Labor Day, or maybe he's wearing sneakers. And you go ballistic and you have the guy thrown out, out into the parking lot.

It's like scene from a nightmare, or a sit com depending upon whether this image makes you cry or laugh.

And like some of you it's also an image I struggle with because I want to think of God having no limit on her invitation to us. I want to think that God isn't so petty that she'll throw us out of her celebration for something as superficial as our clothes. I struggle with this story because it reminds me of all of the petty ways

Christianity has been presented as an exclusive club, a club that isn't open, and isn't loving to all of God's children.

But when I think about this parable a bit longer I think what it is trying to say to us is that we are given a calling by God, we are invited by God to live out her message of love and compassion in our lives. It's not enough to simply show up at God's invitation, we need to respond and live into this visionary gift God has given us.

I've called this gift a seat, based on the hymn Plenty Good Room. Matthew calls it a robe. Whatever you want to name it each one of us is given a unique calling, a specific invitation to bring a little more peace to the world, a little more imagination to the challenges that face all of us, a little more compassion to our relationships.

On this day where we welcome four new members into our church we thank God for the gifts that all of us bring to our community, and

look forward to how our shared journey together continues to
expand and deepen.

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AMEN.