

John Sampson  
"Rehearsing the Kingdom"  
Text: Jeremiah 28:5 - 9  
Preached at KVCC  
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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.

Today is a day for action. Today is a day to live words which we have spoken, and which we have heard spoken to us.

Today is the Sabbath and on this day we are supposed to rest. And today we will rest from words that promise "war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms."

But today we will also live "words of peace." And we will live the return of the exiles.

For today is the day when we celebrate our communion, with each other, and with God.

In worship over the past couple of weeks we have been reflecting on what it means to be a welcoming community. Our church is beginning to consider going through the Open and Affirming process that will more deeply and more explicitly welcome sexual and gender minorities, people who have traditionally been shunned by the church.

But we haven't stopped there in our imaging of an ever greater welcoming.

We've also considered the ways in which we may be called to more radically and inclusively welcome those of different ability, to open ourselves to a spectrum of mental and physical capacity within our worship, and our wider church community.

And last week we considered opening our welcome in another direction, to include those within our town who thirst for a spiritual home and may not feel welcome in ***this*** spiritual home. I challenged those present in worship last Sunday to reach out and invite friends and neighbors to join us here today not for our benefit, but as an expression of God's call of love and desire to be in communion with all of her children. If you are new to this church, or haven't been here in a while, welcome!

Over the past couple of weeks we have heard words of invitation, and words of welcome. Today the words are released and we live into the welcome. We live into the welcome around this table.

I have mentioned before that we can understand our worship as a form of spiritual boot camp. It's a place we can try out, and practice the message of Jesus and the prophets. And then we can take what

we have learned here out into the world. If we don't get it this Sunday, no worries. There is next Sunday, and the Sunday after that, and the Sunday after that, until the end of the world.

But before the end of the world we have this Sunday. This day to learn and practice something new about God's welcome.

Why are you here today?

A simple question. But is the answer as simple? You may respond you are here because someone in the congregation invited you, or that you always come to church on Sunday, or that you want to hear our guest musicians from the Seagle Colony. All good responses.

But I ask you to listen to your heart, to your deeper need and desire.

Do you come to this place to know peace?

God welcomes you.

Do you come to this table to experience community and friendship?

God welcomes you.

Do you come to worship to nourish a vision of hope that can be lost as you live your daily life?

God welcomes you.

What is that deep yearning that brought you through those doors this morning?

God welcomes you.

To be welcomed not in spite of our need, but because of our need, is an expression of God's community. And that is such a different vision of the worth of the individual than the ways we so often value ourselves, and those around us. In our society we are prized for our youth, our beauty, our money, our connections to the powerful, our control. But look around you. We are all welcomed here this morning by God. I know not everyone here this morning are BFFs, best friends forever. I know that some of us grate on each other, that we are more than aware of the imperfections of one another. Our faith doesn't ask us to plaster over those feelings, to deny the ways we are challenging to each other. To be a member of a church doesn't magically make us all more patient, more forgiving, and less annoying. What it does ask us to do is to commit to continuing to work together towards God's dream of peace and equality in our world. Look around you, think of a person in this room who might be really challenging for you to interact with. God has welcomed that person, not in spite of their failings and their quirks, but because

of them. And God is asking you to welcome that person. Look around you, think of a person in this room you may not know very well, or who may be completely new to you. God has welcomed that person. God is asking you to welcome that person.

And the 24 million dollar question is, how will we respond to God's request? How will we welcome the person who we're not especially fond of, or the person who is new, or the person we don't know and only see at church?

We can respond as simply as making it a point to say hello at coffee hour.

We can respond as simply as sitting next to someone in worship we might not usually sit next to.

We can respond as simply as volunteering to usher with someone who is new to the congregation.

How can we respond to God's request? We can respond in many small and simple ways. For it is within the small and simple that we prepare for the large and the complex.

Welcoming each other, and welcoming those who are not yet with us, is hard work. It's soul work on each of our parts. It's work that asks us to change, and make room for each other at God's table. It asks us to look critically at ourselves. It asks us in humility to give up our power in favor of the other. And it's work that requires the courage to speak our truths, and receive those truths that other's share with us openly and with grace.

And that's why worship is a kind of spiritual boot camp, a kind of rehearsal for the Kingdom. It's not easy, and it asks a lot from each



of us. But it prepares us, little by little, to reenter our lives with a new perspective, a perspective of God's love for all of humanity.

Worship prepares us not only to share words of peace, but to show the world what those words of peace look like as they are lived in community, a community just like this one.

AMEN.