

## Hello and Goodbye

August 22, 2010: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-15; Ps. 81:1, 10-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

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“We are here to worship a wonderful God. Don’t come as slaves, come as those made free in Christ Jesus. Don’t come as the unworthy, come as invited guests of our Lord...Come as the joyful, come as the eager, come as the thankful, come as the recipients of amazing grace.” For me the Rev. Fairchild’s words exude a sense of inclusion and welcome, just the right intro for a sermon on hello and goodbye.

While I am called to preach about invitation and hospitality you know on Nathan’s last Sunday I’m sure to have some musical references, although don’t expect any singing. As we invite the stranger to the welcome table, it’s hard to think about, let alone to say goodbye to one who started out as a stranger but who has become family. So before we say goodbye, let’s talk about hello and about becoming an inviting people.

Hello in the words of Neil Diamond is all about putting “...your heart above your head.” Our scriptures reveal a life lived through the heart and not the head. As defined by Alcoholics Anonymous “Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” So when we enter this place of worship who do we center our hearts and minds on? I’ve got to admit that in recent months I’ve had to do some deep work on that question and on myself. Yes, I have feet of clay and I’m not afraid to own up to my own foibles and missteps.

This past Monday a speaker at Tri-C’s convocation said something that truly resonated with me striking at the heart of our lessons today. Paraphrasing slightly it went like this - we are only human and thankfully “...human being is a verb and not a noun for we are all in the process of becoming...” and the journey is all about “...the lessons learned and the wisdom earned traveling the hills and valleys of our lives. ...” (W. Joye Hardiman speech, CCC 8/23/10)

The last time I preached I talked about *Takin’ it to the Streets* and finding myself after our last IHN hosting experience in a place I never thought I would find myself – ready to bail on the whole thing. I found myself “...bewitched, bothered and bewildered...” for low and behold even though time and again I preach welcome and inclusion, I was apparently living a lie, and I was ready to close the door rather than throw it wide open because our guests were not like me and it made me uncomfortable and being uncomfortable made me angry. Clearly I was in need of an attitude adjustment

I also remember one sermon in which I teasingly commented on Peter taking my parking spot. As I reflected on today’s lesson I was taken back to that time and really taken aback to realize that though I really was teasing there was an element of truth and a sense of ownership in my words, ownership of that parking spot and ownership of a perceived status, a preferred place in the pecking order. The lessons learned and hopefully the wisdom earned is that I am but one among many who are loved and forgiven by the grace of God. And hopefully my hello has been more welcoming in the days since.

How many of you are sitting where you always sit come Sunday morning? How many of you have found yourselves somewhat out of sorts or even grumbling when your usual seat is occupied by another? I could ask for a show of hands, but I won’t ask you to incriminate yourselves. We are invited to think of ourselves less and about others more for our place at the table is not based on our wealth or social status or longevity. Hello again and goodbye. It’s about hospitality to strangers, hospitality to those who can’t repay the gesture. Whether it be nightly dinners with our IHN guests, the community meal or sharing in the Eucharist each of us must work out for ourselves how we live into God’s call to invite the outcast and the undesirable and include them in our lives not for their good, but for ours.

Sinners and saints, beggars and choosers, friends and strangers we each come to this place and this table as sisters and brothers - equals in the eyes and in the heart and in the hands of the Savior. There are empty spaces among us, some vacant for many years and some soon to be vacated such as the hole in the fabric of our lives created by Nathan’s departure. Those places can only be filled if we allow God to issue an invitation through us. What words, what actions on our part or aspects of our lives will indicate the

sincerity of our invitation. How about this - next Sunday move out of your comfort zone, take a walk on the wild side try sitting in a different pew or on the other side of the aisle or maybe try coming to 10:30 (8:00) service. Who knows, you might be entertaining angels or at the very least meet someone new.

Hello and goodbye two ends of one spectrum. As we welcome the stranger it is so hard to say goodbye. That's got to be a song title right? When I googled it, do you want to bet how many songs popped up? Whether they be singing the blues, country or R&B songwriters, both the well-known and at least to me unknown, have written and/or sung about loss, separation and an unwillingness to say goodbye. Billy Preston, The Jackson Five, Clifton Davis, Celine Deon, & Miley Cyrus all sing about departures.

Nathan to paraphrase Gabrielle's goodbye song, I'm here to tell you "...our hearts are aching...for nothing hurts like goodbye..." As All 4 One sings, we're "... not ready to say goodbye!" because in the legendary phrasing of The Jackson 5 we "...Don't want to let you go!" We thank you for the gifts of friendship and music that you have shared with us. We hope you know that wherever your journey takes you, in the immortal words of Carole King "...you've got a friend ...Winter, spring, summer or fall – All you have to do is call..." and the people of Christ Church "...will be there ... you've got a friend..." There will always be a place of honor at our table for you. We are sad to see you go, but know that we are never, ever gonna say goodbye it will always be hello. We wish you joy, we wish you peace; we wish you glorious music wherever your travels may take you. Amen.