

Luke 10:1-12, Acts 8:26-39
People of Peace
July 8, 2018

Today I am going to be speaking about People of Peace and Divine Appointments. A couple of months ago my friend Rev. Brunk called me all excited because another pastor friend of his who was serving as a Chaplain at Guantanamo Bay was being appointed to a church in South Texas. This Chaplain loves to hunt and found out there was a lot of hog hunting in the area of Texas he was going, and wanted us to come down and hunt with him once he was there.

Well fast forward two months. My brother-in-law who is also a UM pastor retired on Sunday 2 weeks ago today, which meant on Tuesday of the week he retired he showed up to begin an interim assignment at a church in South Texas. It seems most Methodist ministers retire multiple times before they finally retire, and God calls them home. I may be seeing my future, because I have another friend here in Arizona who retired one week from his church and was appointed the next week as the pastor of the church he retired from.

Anyway, since I was on vacation, I decided to ride along with my brother-in-law to meet his new church. So that morning I prayed, Lord let me meet a "person of peace." Well I was sitting in as my brother-in-law spoke with the 2 lay leaders and the Staff Parrish Chair and my brother-in-law mentioned to the Staff Parrish Chair I liked to hunt.

Well that began a long conversation with the SPRC chair because her husband is a professional hunting guide in the area. She and I spent most of the time talking about hunting, and I got her husband's phone number and we are setting up a hunt. And beyond that the new pastor coming in after my brother-in-law is the chaplain from Guantanamo Bay.

Some would say coincidence. I would say divine appointments. And Divine Appointments aren't just for UM pastors. In fact I believe God is always leading us to divine appointments with people both within and without the Christian faith.

Some within the faith we are called to be disciples by and others we are called to disciple and some God just knows we need a friend or other help.

In our Luke scripture we see the concept and practice of “People of Peace” laid out, and in our Acts scripture we see a specific instance of it being lived out. Both scripture stories today deal with the gospel being spread by Divine Appointments and People of Peace.

Here’s what we see from our Luke reading. In verses 5 & 6 of Luke 10 Jesus says, *“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.”* It is from this scripture we get the concept of the “Person of Peace.”

This is a person who is open to the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is a person that each and every one of us has been commissioned and sent by Jesus to meet. This is a unique person to each and every one of us that God has sent us specifically to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

What I am talking about is evangelism as a team sport like Jesus did it. He sent people out by 2s or 12s or communities of 70. We witness individually by our lives and our words, but to do effective evangelism in today’s world, **we need to do it as a team sport inviting people into an extended family of faith.** This is what we have here at Vista Church an extended family of faith.

A person of peace is a man or woman whom God has prepared their heart to be open to the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed. They will be open to your invitation to respond on the most elemental level to a social invitation, and if you know how to disciple someone, eventually to an invitation to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A person of peace: Likes you,
Welcomes you
Serves you
Listens to you

First of all **a person of peace likes you**. And so when you like someone **(Second)** you **welcome them into your life and you into theirs**.

Now I must say it is not me and it is not you that attracts these People of Peace and that they are responding to. It is the Jesus in you and in me that people respond to. It is the Holy Spirit in me and in you that people respond to because without the Holy Spirit you and I are nothing!!!! Methodists talk about this as **“Prevenient Grace”**.

Now **third, a Person of Peace serves you**. What does that mean? In Jesus’ day they would put you up for the night or week and feed you. In our over-committed world today, where time is the most precious commodity, this often comes down to a person spending their time with you, praying for you, or simply buying you a cup of coffee, which is why I picked the cover of the bulletin.



Who is serving who is this picture? Is it the young woman serving the older woman, or the other way around? Deep conversation and conversion can happen over a simple shared drink of meal. We celebrate this in a sense every month when we share in Holy Communion.

Fourth, a Person of Peace eventually will listen to your message- the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

We actually are surrounded by “People of Peace” and the problem is not so much identifying them, but for us approaching life with the sense of being sent to them. And so we need to be **intentional, open to those whom God puts into our lives, and act.**

I am not sure I would have met and been open to what the Chairperson of the SPRC of my brother-in-law’s new church offered me if I hadn’t prayed for it, if I hadn’t asked God to put a “Person of Peace”

in my life that day; and in a sense been introduced to that church before I ever set foot in it.

We indeed need to pray that God opens the eyes of our hearts to see people as he sees them and be open to witnessing to them in word and deed as we meet them. We are surrounded by people in need of the touch of the loving hand of God. And we are the unnamed “70 others” sent by Jesus to “cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

As is often the case when characters in the Bible aren’t named it is so we can include ourselves in that group. We today are the “70 others.”

Now most of us don’t have an angel of God directing us like Philip did in the Acts story, but we do have the Spirit guiding us into relationships with People of Peace. In verse 29 it says, “Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” You and I, we have that same Spirit through our baptism and if we listen to the Spirit we can identify the People of Peace God has sent us to.

Remember a person of peace:	Likes you, Welcomes you Serves you Listens to you
------------------------------------	--

In Acts the Ethiopian court official liked Philip, welcomed Philip, served Philip by inviting him to sit in his chariot and finally he listened to Philip receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ and was baptized. The entire concept and practice of “People of Peace” we see lived out in this story.

Philip was aware of and he was open to the direction of the Holy Spirit to be guided to a “Divine Appointment”. And then Philip followed through by explaining the scriptures to the Ethiopian Official and guiding him to confession of faith and baptism.

In our lives we are surrounded by people looking to connect with God. We need to be aware of this and live lives that are filled with expectancy that the next person we meet might be the one to whom God has called us as surely and mysteriously as the Holy Spirit called Philip to the Ethiopian. That meeting may lead to someone coming to faith and being baptized.

It may lead to something as simple as a cup of coffee or a hog hunt. But as you are on the journey of your life know that God has Divine Appointments set for you. Pray for them. Be prepared for them. Be open to them and know that when they occur they will be pleasant and positive for a Person of Peace:

Likes you,
Welcomes you
Serves you
Listens to you

As we do this the Kingdom of God will grow. Our Church will grow and our individual lives will deepen spiritually. And if someone will not receive you as a Person of Peace know that God calls you to peace. Just move on. That's what the whole verse about knocking the dust off your sandals is about. Just move on.

Now my big challenge that I have been thinking and talking about, is how can we find and be People of Peace when we don't see each other eyeball to eyeball? We average about 100 people a week joining us for worship online. Think about that for a moment. If this is an average Sunday at least 100 people not here in this room are worshipping God with us.

These people by their presence online certainly like us, welcome us, and some even serve us through their prayers and donations, and they certainly listen to us.

So in this age of the internet where we are reaching out to people literally around the world and I would like to say "hi!" to those joining in worship in Switzerland today. How are we, and how can we, build the

kingdom of God together? In Jesus' day and for the last 2000 years the gospel was spread face to face, or in written form how can this electronic media be used for the Kingdom's purposes?

These are the questions we ask in our "Satellite Fellowship" committee, because soon we will be heavily involved in using it to start new Satellite Fellowships, in essence new churches. We are soon to be the 70 sent out to start new churches. I don't know all the answers right now, but I know we need to be faithful like Philip was and go where the Spirit has called us to go. I know we need to do exactly what Jesus called us to do in the Scripture today.

"He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

I'm deeply committed to this adventure. I covet your prayers and your participation. Let's jump on this and see what God will do. In the next 2 months I will be setting dates for training teams, our 70 to go out in the field in search of People of Peace. Search your hearts, and ask is God calling you?

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

In Jesus' name amen.