**3 Pentecost, June 29, 2014,**

[**Gen 22:1-14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+22%3A1-14&version=NRSV)**;**[**Ps 13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+13&version=NRSV)**;**[**Romans 6:12-23**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+6%3A12-23&version=NRSV)**;**[**Matt 10:40-42**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+10%3A40-42&version=NRSV)**, Rev Mary Trainor**

Yes, I did something really stupid this week, the veteran tent camper that I am. Jim and I went camping and after dinner the first night we arrived, we packed up our food in a plastic bin and left it on the picnic table under some heavy stuff. Was this good enough? No. At 2 AM, we were awoken by animal noises and alas -- a very large, very happy raccoon had eaten our cookies, rolls, marshmallows, and granola bars. We found the wrappers widely scattered nearby the next morning; our leaving the food box out was a big welcome to the raccoon! Being obedient to camping rules is something that I know about from way back in scouts, yet was I obedient to these rules? No. As you know, this past Thursday was my birthday and I received a card from my brother that said, "**be bad on your birthday"** and on the inside it sings: "**very bad**. It got me laughing and laughing....but seriously, we don't like to be obedient, do we? And, it seems like obedience is even less popular now than it was when I was a child. It is popular to be bad: that TV show "Girls behaving badly" is very well-liked, to name just one example. So, when we listen to Bible stories about needing to be obedient -- we have a tendency to either feel guilty or shut our ears because we don't want to hear. Today's Scriptures teach us lessons both about obedience and welcoming - we all have things to learn about both obeying God and being welcoming to people (not raccoons).

To obey means to hear God's word and act accordingly; we are to listen, and learn from God and behave accordingly. When we obey, we respond to God with trust and faith. When we don't obey God, we become separated from Him -- and this is sin. Paul talks a lot about this in today's reading from Romans, and he tells us the reward, "***the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** God gives us the strength to obey, and obedience to God naturally happens when you "***love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength***" (Deut 6:5). This is where Abraham was coming from in our OT reading this morning -- he lived a life of trust and love in God. But, oh was his obedience tested here! How could it be that our good God would ask faithful Abraham to sacrifice his precious son? This makes no sense to us! It is certainly was God's way of getting Abraham's and our full attention. Attention about two things: (1) that Jesus, the sacrificial lamb, was going to come to save us....as Abraham said, "***God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering***" and He did, and (2) that we should trust in the Lord, for "***The Lord will provide***." These two lessons are clear now to us, but I am sure they were not clear to Abraham way back them on Mount Moriah. Things look different to God than they look to us; God has the long, complete view of things and we don't. God **will** provide for us, on His timescale and in His way. We need to trust in this as fact, even when we cannot see hope when we are going through tough situations. As the Psalmist said in today's Psalm, "***I put my trust in your mercy, my heart is joyful because of your saving help***." God provides.

We see the theme of obedience again in today's Gospel, which is a continuation of Jesus teaching about discipleship. Today, Jesus' emphasis is on welcoming: being hospitable to others, even others who are different from us, even others we do not like. For in each person we welcome, we see Jesus. Jesus said, "***whoever welcomes you welcomes me....and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple--truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward***." We are obedient by welcoming others and we obtain the strength to do this from God. Welcoming can range from helping someone who is homeless find a place to stay and a meal, to being caring to someone who is marginalized or in trouble. The kind of hospitality Jesus is speaking of here is radical, for it includes reaching out to strangers. This is not so simple in our culture today, which is not a very welcoming culture. We are in a culture of fear and suspicion.

The two little boys were adorable. They sat at a table near us waiting for their parents to pick up their food at the snack bar counter. We were eating ice cream cones after a long hike, and greeted at the boys. The older of the two boys, who looked about 5, said thoughtfully and hesitantly to me, "**Oh, it's ok if I talk with you now -- ah -- because my mother is right over there and can see me."** Clearly, this boy was well trained not to talk with strangers -- and he was carefully being obedient. He was raised in a culture of distrust. The parents came over, and we had a nice brief chat. But this incident made me think about how we are all wary of welcoming the stranger, in spite of being called to do so, in spite of this being part of our obedience to God. We subsist in and function in our lives that are quite insulated and isolated; we are protected from strangers, and so we get out of practice dealing with them. And, our natural, first tendency is to be wary, and then we want to see them conform to our view of what is right (whether it be how they behave or how they wear their hat or how they speak).

Yet, we are to reach out to people just as they are, and care for them as Jesus would; as disciples, we are Jesus' hands and feet and ears and eyes. Jesus is good at seeing what life is like through the eyes of others, but we aren't so good at this. We can't imagine how tough it is to have to sleep on a bench or under a tree during the day, because if you sleep at night you risk being beaten up or robbed. Did you know that here at St John's we have regular requests to help people in need, with anything from gasoline to paying utility bills to helping them survive to the end of the month. Did you know that there are about 100 homeless kids here in Shawano?

Did you catch the word "***even***" in Jesus' words? We don't have to solve all the problems that people are facing, but "***even a cup of cold water***" is appreciated. Small gestures make big differences; like the circles that form in a lake after a fish jumps -- the impact of the kindness expands. Christ welcomed you. And as we welcome others, we welcome none other than Christ. Each day, we can decide if we want to follow God or follow the way of behaving badly - it is up to us. Will you decide to trust in God? Will you decide to accept others without judgment, even though their way of living is so different from yours? Your heart will be joyful because of God's saving help. Amen.