

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of peace bloom and grow... Amen.

One of my jobs in college was working for the Soil Science Department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. It was a fun job because the summers involved a ton of field work...

Going around the state of Wisconsin and taking soil samples from a variety of farm fields...

Followed by sieving soil for hours with my coworker...

The work was plentiful and the labors were few... It was mainly us two working for two other graduate students, and it felt like the bags of soil samples were never ending...

Soil that at the same time, was quite fascinating as it varied greatly... From red clay like soil, to robust and moist black soil, to dry and sandy soil with teeny tiny rocks...

The variety amazed me and the fact that all of these soil samples supported crops was fascinating.

It was also exhilarating to be sent out all over the state of Wisconsin driving for hours to some fields and discussing the intricacies of soil, crops, and life.

At the same time, it also felt like a great responsibility, knowing that most days it was just my coworker and I who were tasked to obtain these samples.

Tasked to uncover the mysteries of what lay below the ground...

Which made me wonder, what did a soil sample all uncover?

And the answer, depending on who you asked, would either be vastly complex, or very simple...

And this tension of complexity and simplicity is what we found in our gospel reading today...

Because the world that Jesus is sending his disciples into is complex...

There are going to be towns, places, and people that will disagree with them and times will not be easy...

In fact, they will be downright devastating...

So much so, that Jesus even said he was sending out his disciples like sheep in the midst of wolves...

Where he further warned that they would see brother betraying brother, children rising against parents, and know they would be hated because of Jesus' name...

And at the same time, what Jesus tasks them with is simple...

As he is sending them out to give peace.

In fact, he even gives them specific instructions, which is, "As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."

So, what does this mean, and how does one determine if someone is worthy?

Well, if we are to think about this in terms of a house and of visiting a stranger as Jesus instructs, we don't have far to look...

As we heard in our reading from Genesis, there were three strangers who arrived at Abrahams dwelling...

Which caused Abraham to run and greet them, where he immediately provided them with shade, where he quickly brought them water to wash their feet, where he hastened to make them bread, where he ran to the herd and got a calf so his servant could hastily prepare it...

A passage that highlights Abraham's urgency to provide genuine hospitality.

And it is through his urgency that we see how much he cares, and specifically how much he cares for complete strangers...

Which is the kind of hospitality that the world so desperately needs right now...

Just imagine if the world was filled with people who cared this much for a stranger, that they would run around fetching things to make them comfortable and nourished.

Instead, we often find the world filled with people who fail to even look one another in the eye.

Where we would rather think of all that we have going on than acknowledge that other people have things going on too... And that maybe they are trying their best with what they have...

But more times than not, the world is filled with people digging in their heels, thinking they are right, and that it is their way or the highway...

Without taking time to recognize the needs of others, to come alongside others and embrace them as beloved children of God.

Afterall, Jesus' instructions are simple, we are to share peace...

And yet, when we try, we often fall short... Because feelings get hurt, resentment festers, and bonds are broken.

Life in all of its complexities is like the many different layers and kinds of soil that permeate this planet...

Soil that can support the earth and its crops... Or soil that can grow bitter and dry, withering away where life once thrived.

So, it is with us humans to... We can either turn bitter, burn bridges, and breed hurt...

Or we can support life and relationships by providing nourishment to one another through genuine kindness and hospitality.

We can support others by coming alongside them, especially when they have a need that we can easily meet.

We can support others by praying for them and journeying with them.

We can support others by going out into the field of life... Rolling up our sleeves and making haste to show that we really do care for God's mission field...

All the while knowing that this doesn't mean that the work is going to be easy...

Because sometimes you may feel that you are a sheep amid wolves... Where your fellow neighbors will rise up against you, just like Jesus warned.

But our choice as Christ followers is clear... We are to share peace.

Peace birthed out of mutual respect. Where we take time to see one other, allowing the Spirit to guide us, God's love to fill us, and Christ's peace to shine through us... Amen.