

Sermon: Meeting in the River
Genesis 18:1-10a
6 Pentecost, Year C

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Over the past three Sundays, strangers just keep walking through the door of the lectionary! Two weeks ago the stranger appeared in Luke's gospel when Jesus's 70 appointed disciples went to share the good news, not knowing whom they would encounter. Last Sunday's Luke reading was about a man who had been attacked and left for dead along the side of the road, and the good Samaritan, a stranger, helped him. Today the strangers appear in our Genesis reading. Judging from our many encounters in scripture with them, God wants us to *learn* something about strangers! So there may be an echo or two from sermons of the past two weeks.

In today's reading Abraham and Sarah are hanging out in their tent in the heat of the day. The text says the Lord appears to them. Then three visitors appear. What does Abraham do? He *runs* to meet them, bows down before them, offers them food and water, rest and a foot washing! Then he *quickly* goes to Sarah and has her prepare the best of what they have to offer, *hurries* to get the dinner rolling. There is a sense of urgency. Yahweh, one name the Hebrews use for God, comes to them in human form! In the local Canaanite polytheistic religion, it was a common feature to have a God and two assistants. We, the reader, have the inside track that within this group of visitors is God, the Lord. But apparently Abraham doesn't know this. Abraham shows hospitality at its best to three human beings. He ends up showing hospitality to God and doesn't even know it!

We have a humanitarian crisis at our nation's southern border with Mexico that calls for an urgent response. The crisis has roots that are deep, complex and troubling. As Christians we are called to see the people in this crisis as the children of God. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has spoken up about the situation. He said this week: "we as a nation, . . . we as a global community, must face and find a way forward for the sake of our brothers and our sisters, for the sake of us all. Deeply embedded in the Christian faith, indeed deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition, which is the mother of the Christian faith, and deeply embedded in the faith and traditions and values of many of the world's great religions, is a profound conviction in a sure and certain value and virtue, that care for the stranger, the alien, the visitor, is a sacred duty, a sacred vow."

Pope Francis has preached repeatedly how Christians must be building bridges rather than building walls. He says to do otherwise is not to be Christian. One example of this metaphorical bridge building I want to share with you this a.m. is something that has recently happened at the U.S./Mexican border. Many of you know of our own Sue Buerkel's son-in-law Michael Buerkel Hunn. He is the Bishop of Rio Grande. In May, in the Rio Grande that divides Lajitas, Texas and Lajita, Mexico (They were actually once one town), Michael led a bi-lingual worship service.

Imagine this scene at this celebration that is called "Voices from both Sides." Mexicans on one side of the river and Americans on the other side, Bishop Michael and another priest and several other folks standing *in the river* with vestments on, bread and wine floating on a tray standing in a place that is neither American nor Mexican. At this event which has been happening the past few years, the both sides eagerly coming together, reaching out to the each other. In one sense this is a community reunion. In another it's a time for folks to reach out to strangers. Here in the

Rio Grande they find common ground, part of both countries, and part of no country. Even with a heavy border patrol presence, the Eucharist is celebrated, bread and wine, the presence of Christ, bringing strangers and families together, unifying, essentially living into the reality of God's kingdom, that all are one, that we are all related.

Just as Abraham was eager to reach out to the three divine visitors, the folks that turned out to be God in human form, Bishop Michael was enthusiastically reaching across to folks reminding us all that we are all part of one human and divine family. God's message of welcome is clear. Some of you have asked about what we can do about the humanitarian crisis at the border. We can pray. We can read. I invite you to include in your reading the posts on the National Episcopal Church web site. You will likely find other ways in which you can help.

There are bound to be ways, right here in Staunton, where we can meet the stranger in the middle of the metaphorical river, some threshold of a place – it may be right outside these doors, offering some form of the love of God. Look for those opportunities; they will be there.

Let us pray: Gracious God, We pray for all immigrants, aliens and strangers, especially those at our nation's southern border. We pray for their well being. We also pray for wisdom for our political leaders who make decisions regarding their care. We pray for border patrols and those involved with our nation's security. Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace.

Amen.