

Honestly, We Just Need Jesus, July 20, 2025

Friends, it is good to be back here in Vermont, after a fulfilling yet intense trip to Kansas City. Over the next few weeks, I'll unpack some of the lessons learned at Synod, and share them with you in this space.

It was definitely a packed agenda, with lots of deep discussion about the state of the United Church of Christ, the state of church in general in our lives, and the state of the world.

It was especially wonderful to get off the plane just in time to show up for our monthly potluck on Wednesday night. As a congregation, we're pretty great at hospitality in many forms, and this was no exception.

What I love most about our potlucks is their simplicity. It takes some work to set up the space, and to wash the dishes, but beyond that, these are not orchestrated events. We don't try to coordinate what is brought, we don't try to impose programming, we simply put out a call for shared food and companionship, and love the answer to that call into being. If two people had showed up, we'd have gone with it, and hoped they brought food, and liked what each other brought. Much more than two people showed up, though, and the right people were in the right place at the right time for whatever transpired. There was no expectation of monetary contribution, there was no recruitment effort for anything in the future. Two of the biggest gifts I received that evening were learning

yet another intriguing fact about Goddard, and being inspired to create a human-size Jenga game. That was enough. Simply existing together can be an act of spirituality and discipleship. For where two or three gather in my name, Jesus reminds us, there am I with them.” Matthew 18, verse 20.

Reverend Cynthia Jarvis, speaking to church purpose and vitality in the context of this week’s gospel reading cautions us that *“a church that has been led to be “worried and distracted by many things” inevitably will be a community that dwells in the shallows of frantic potlucks, anxious stewardship campaigns, and events designed simply to perpetuate the institution”*.

One thing the Old Meeting House has taught me, against many of my darker instincts, is that we may have many irons in the fire, but these are not sources of worry and distraction. Yes, we are in the midst of a campaign for the stewardship of this historic resource, and yes, we have potlucks. No, they are not designed to simply perpetuate the institution. We may not always know, and we certainly do not always agree on what specifically brings us to this space, but we return each week, in praise and study of something larger than ourselves, and in solidarity with a world that certainly needs to pause and listen.

It is in our nature to be hospitable, and hospitality is a form of discipleship. This is seen all the way back to Genesis, as we just read

today. Imagine the awe of a known God in human form, accompanied by two angels appearing to Abraham. What's his first response? He offers them food, drink and rest, and scrambles to make it happen. He asks them no questions, he assumes no intention for their visit, he offers them a feast, and offers his company as they eat.

Likewise, Martha is showing discipleship in welcoming Jesus into her home, and ostensibly performing the tasks necessary to make that welcome extravagant. Her actions are not what Jesus rebukes, it's her distraction and worry that Mary also must join in, lest Jesus not be welcomed enough. In this, she misses the purpose of his visit...and don't we all sometimes miss that purpose? Don't we all get too caught up in making preparations for extravagant welcome that we overlook the presence of the welcomed? I know I do.

I know that despite warnings against it, I frequently get trapped into judging myself based on visibly demonstrating incredibly hard work in the functional aspects of my role here, at the expense of my own spiritual practice, and I know that's something to keep working on. I need to remind myself that as stated by pastor Tom Fuerst, *"If I am a religious CEO or a PR rep for Jesus, then I'm being paid to stay busy.*

But if my job is attentiveness to the work of God, then that requires silence, stillness, sacred conversation, study and prayer - none of which

are valued in our hyper-productive, always-working but never-arriving Capitalist society”.

As a church, we've all had to remind ourselves of that this past year. Today marks the one year anniversary of our sudden need to do the business of keeping this church running from within, as a congregation of called lay leaders. Everyone involved in what it took to keep the institution alive was tired, everyone was in some ways burned out, and yet, here we are a year later, all still together. Despite having to take on so much extra work, we didn't lose anyone in the process. That tells me that this place, and this work matters. Yes, there are elements of obligation and pride in keeping it going, but that is dramatically overshadowed by elements of love. Not one of us is obligated by this town or this neighborhood to be a steward of this sacred, historic space. We are not a member of a denomination that requires or dictates whether our church will stay open or closed. There is no higher human power or structure that we answer to. We are truly independent, and if we all made the decision to stand up and walk away right now, there would be no further repercussions from any human authority. And here we are, and it appears we are not going anywhere. Each of us is served by all of us in our own way, and at the end of the day, our desire to come together in

service to, and in communication with a higher power calls us together and binds us together. It's right in our covenant, written 60 years ago:

WHEREAS we have already experienced our essential unity of spirit and purpose, and some of the benefits and joys which may be expected to be derived by each of us from a better organized plan of work in this place;

We promise, as the Lord shall enable us, to strive daily to live after the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ and to do all in our power to create a proper atmosphere within the Church and the Community, which will lead others to come into fellowship with God and into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are called to honor and emulate the hospitality of Sarah and Abraham, and the service of Martha, and at the same time, by our very covenant, we are reminded of the importance of Mary. The phrase "sitting at the feet of the Lord" is an English translation for which history has done no favors. At the time of the writing of the Gospel, it did not communicate a passive or submissive action, but instead, an act of higher, formal education, describing the powerful and intimate relationship between a disciple and a rabbi. In this case, making the choice to be in communion with Jesus, to learn everything possible from Jesus. Neither Mary nor Martha were idle, and neither Mary nor Martha

were on the wrong track. Jesus' seemingly harsh rebuke of Martha served to demonstrate the need for the balance between the two roles.

Before I left for Synod, we had a conversation in church about what we have been doing and plan to do to spread the good news, bring empathy and do the good work in this increasingly difficult world. At the request of a few who wanted to hear other's ideas, I included a link in last week's newsletter to share thoughts. It shouldn't surprise me that there were zero responses to the form. After all, I've spent the last decade of educational leadership involved in various portfolio-based graduation efforts to "empower" students to document and reflect on their own learning. Turns out, documenting and reflecting is not very enjoyable or empowering for most. As recently as last semester, I found myself still sharing the one example from 2014 of the one student who found making a digital portfolio truly meaningful. It's still around, kassandradp.weebly.com if you want to check it out.

Turns out, we are far more likely to want to have the experience, and then put the experience into action than reflect upon it.

I received one email response, and one comment on our Youtube channel. The emailed response was a call to action around making sure the abundance of our gardens might find its way to local food shelves, and a wonderment about how we can better directly support our

unhoused neighbors. The YouTube comment, from my friend Dana who has been joining us online from the Northeast Kingdom said this:

“Dave this may not answer what I'm doing or what I can be doing but this is the first thing that popped in my head when you asked the question”. It was followed by a link to a song by contemporary Christian singer songwriter Terrian, entitled “Honestly, I think we just need Jesus.”

Right on, Dana, if you're joining us today, right on.

In last week's State of the Church address, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson declared “all would not agree on who they think we are as the United Church of Christ, because we can't even agree on who we are as the United Church of Christ, because that's just who we are”. I believe the same could be said for the Old Meeting House. We don't always need to agree on the why. That's just who we are, and who we are, is a beautiful community called to be the stewards of this sacred space, called to balance and honor the discipleship of both Martha, and Mary, because in the end, in this world, in this nation where, in the words of Terrian, Have we lost our minds, What used to be wrong, We say that it's right, Honestly, I think we just need Jesus.

May we continue to grow as a congregation that, in the words of Rev. Jarvis, is led to position itself at Christ's feet — wrestling like Jacob for God's blessing, studying and nurturing a faith that seeks understanding,

so that even the details of the common life begin to resound with good news.

Just like our potlucks.

Honestly, I do think that we just need Jesus. May we not get so caught up in the trappings of welcoming him into our space, that we forget to sit with him and listen.