

Crestfield Harvest Day 2009
Rev. Betty L. Angelini

“How About Those Disciples?”
Matthew 19:13-15

How about those disciples? Frequently misunderstanding what Jesus was trying to say or do. Not really “getting it”, they end up learning the hard way what Jesus wanted them to understand about him, and life and death and life eternal. Look at the time of feeding the five thousand. The crowd was hungry, they had listened intently to Jesus’ teaching, and it was time to eat. And those disciples told Jesus to send the crowd away so they could get something to eat on their own. Not a great example of hospitality is it? Anyway, Jesus rebukes the disciples and tells them how to feed those five thousand men plus the women and children. And now here, in our lesson today, is yet another example of Jesus rebuking the disciples, those disciples who really are probably trying so hard to be helpful. Those disciples want to send away those who are bringing the children for Jesus to bless. Just one chapter before in Matthew 18, Jesus told the disciples that welcoming children meant welcoming Jesus himself. The forgetful disciples, instead of remembering Jesus words to welcome children, push them back away from Jesus, like the bouncers around Mickey Mouse at Disney World protecting Mickey. But Jesus patiently helps the disciples to understand that the children really do need to come to him and be with him and receive his blessing.

That is our mission here at Crestfield, just like it is your mission at your church, to bring others to Christ, to have Christ bless them, to have them know what it is like to have Jesus touch you and hold you and help you and save you. And yet, although those original 12 disciples are not present to hold back those children, things happen and things exist that prevent children, not just grade school kids, or children of middle school or high school, but children of all ages, children that are young at heart from coming to know Jesus, to feel his touch, to hear his words.

We come to celebrate the blessings of God’s abundance with the Harvest. We come to praise God for summer weather that nourished fields and flora and fauna. We come to praise God for food on the table, for friends that are there when we need them, for a summer of allowing God’s creation to grow and be sustained and bear fruit. Crestfield has experienced a summer of multiple blessings. I am a cup half full person, but I think our cup is overflowing with blessings;

- We are thankful because God has provided Crestfield with the opportunity to work over the years to develop partnerships with congregations and mission agencies in sharing Christ’s love for all of God’s children. In 2009, Crestfield served 363 children at residential camp. These 363 represent 98 churches from at least 3

different presbyteries. 53 of these campers participated in the Mission Possible program and went out into the community and served 5 mission agencies. Also, children prayed out loud and in community. Youth led meaningful and inspiring worship services. 24 counselors from worked in partnership with the 6 permanent staff of Crestfield to feed each of these campers physically, mentally, emotionally and most importantly spiritually. Surprisingly enough, campers experienced Bible study or worship 4 times per day in addition to all of those spontaneous learning moments throughout the day.

- We are thankful because God has blessed Crestfield with the opportunity to work with 275 children at 14 different daycamp sites throughout Pgh Presbytery. We thank God for the revelation that if we stay up here at Slippery Rock we will wither and die. God has blessed us with the courage to step away from this beautiful site and take Crestfield to Pgh. This has not been easy and each of us has had the shakes and jitters over this adventure. But, God has been faithful and lead us and kept us safe in our travel, outreach and ministry.
- We are thankful because God blessed us with the opportunity to award approximately \$14,000 to date in summer camper scholarships for 2009. 84 children received support to come to Crestfield and experience a week of fun, community, hearing stories of Jesus' great love and perhaps had seeds of reconciliation planted in all of our beings.
- We are thankful because God blessed us with various retreat groups and individual pastors who utilized Crestfield to grow in their discipleship with Christ Jesus and enjoy a time of Sabbath and rejuvenation so that they leave refreshed and ready to continue the hard work of ministry in these shaky times.
- We are thankful for all of the volunteers who work to make Crestfield, God's instrument. For Chaplains, Grandmoms, Ministry team members, work groups who clear trails, paint cabins and rooms, install toilets, split wood and just about anything else we need done.
- We are thankful for God's blessing of support in all shapes and forms. For the prayer support that we know and feel that we constantly receive. Please keep praying for us. We need it. We are thankful for financial support. Only by individual and church gifts are we able to do what we do. Our fees only cover a portion of our costs.
- We are thankful for deepened faith of campers and retreaters given by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Recently, summer campers spoke at their church about their camp experiences. Of course they mentioned the loved pioneer and pansausages, but more importantly they talked about how they grew. They learned not to judge, they learned to be friends with people not just like them and

how they were challenged and taught to see God through everything we do. Truly lessons of learning how to be a disciple of Christ and deepen their own faith.

- We are thankful for summer staff who stay connected to each and Christ through weekly “Where I saw God this week” on Face Book, who return to help with this outreach event.
- The list is endless because our God is truly a God of abundance and has given us countless blessings.

And despite this abundance of the harvest that we joyfully celebrate today, I have this gnawing feeling, this everpresent sense, that more could be done. As I read the newspaper and listen to the car radio, television or streaming internet , I hear about violence and think how that violence is holding back children, youth and even those who are young at heart from knowing Jesus, feeling his touch, hearing his words, experiencing his saving grace. Violence about people abusing other people including children sexually, violence of kids with guns, even killing other kids with those guns, violence in the work place with corrupt business executives, violence in the government with crooked politicians and no agreements being reached on a state budget because everyone seems to want to take but not to give, even violence in the creation itself with intense talks about global warming and finally violence we exhibit toward ourselves and our children with scheduling thing to do after thing to do and not taking time for ourselves. The statistics about violence are huge for the city of Pittsburgh alone. Hearing them, they just scream out violence, juveniles, especially African American juveniles are arrested for more property and drug related crimes in the city of Pgh than in the county and nation. Violence is preventing all God’s children from knowing about Jesus and his saving grace.

We need to work together, in partnership, in community, with Christ at the center of that community to start to end this violence. Solomon in all his glorious wisdom tells us that it takes at least 2 people for work to get done, and that a cord of three strands is not easily broken, 3 strands, you, me and Christ, 3 strands, your local church and community, Crestfield and Christ. By partnering together, more children of all ages can come to Jesus and be blessed. In partnership we can understand the difference between the violence of creation with its predatory constituency and the beauty of creation and the opportunity it provides for redemption and reconciliation. Unpublished research from Rodger Nishioka of Columbia Theological Seminary reveals that it takes at least 19 hours of contact to build lasting relationships. Summer camp and retreats provide that kind of time together easily and quickly with God’s children living in a community, eating, sleeping, studying and having fun together. Summer camp and retreats can provide the time and the space for the Holy Spirit to begin to build lasting relationships that have the power to affect change. This can certainly happen at home or in the church, it just might take longer and there will probably be more distractions that need to be dealt with. Listen to a story

of how Christ worked in a camper and a counselor during the course of 1 week. An experienced counselor writes about one camper he had. The camper was seventeen and his parents adopted him. The counselor also found out quickly that the camper did not choose to come to camp but was forced by his parents to come for bad behavior. They told him it might do him some good but ultimately they were using it as punishment as separation from friends. He wasn't especially bad but a little difficult at first. During the first bible study he argued a little bit about something one of the counselors said they believed and later the camper explained that he didn't really have a relationship with God. Things started to get better as the days went on and the counselor started to grow really close to him. Through lots of side conversations the counselor learned that the two were really similar. The counselor writes, I also learned that he had a wonderful talent for drawing. We talked a lot of using our talents to serve God and others. He had a lot of wonderful fun and he started to really become more engaged in the bible studies and night devotions. At the end of the week he even said he wished we had more time for both of these. Also he told me that he felt a lot closer to God and he did not feel so awkward praying anymore. It was amazing for me to witness this camper to grow closer to God even though he, at first, didn't want to be here. What a wonderful story of how working together, parent, camp and Christ, great transformation can begin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We celebrate the abundance of the harvest. We praise God for all that God has done in providing for us so richly and deeply. And now, as the crops are harvested, as the leaves fall, as the hot summer days change to cool days and will soon be cold nights with snow falling, nature will become dormant, preparing itself for another growing season. But, this is not a time for us to become dormant. Edmund Burke, a famous nineteenth century British statesman says something like, "All that the forces of evil need to win in this world is for enough good people to do nothing." You are all good people. The question is, will you do nothing? Please do not become dormant, please partner with Crestfield to reach more children of all ages. Don't be like the disciples, pushing people away. Listen and understand what Jesus is saying, "Let the children come to me."