*Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the Triune God who sends us forth to serve. Amen.*

Today’s Gospel comes from the end of a portion of text from Matthew’s Gospel known as the Missionary Discourse. It is a sending out of the disciples. Jesus is equipping them to go out into the world for the sake of the Gospel. It is a benediction of sorts, both a blessing and a call to action. We heard previously in the Missionary Discourse, in last Sunday’s Gospel, that the work of being a disciple is very difficult. There will be trials, there will be persecutions, to be identified with Jesus was politically, religiously, and socially radical, even dangerous. To welcome one of these disciples into your home was also radical. To follow Jesus at this time was to turn against the empire, a dangerous move indeed. It was to turn against those things that the world dictates as valuable (wealth and power) and instead focus on serving the least of the world, and following a God who commands us to love our neighbor more than we love ourselves.

 But this text is so much more than a superficial command to be hospitable or welcoming. Being of service to others is certainly a commendable thing, but I am not convinced that is what is going on in this text. Jesus is equipping his followers to get out into the world and do something. *This text is not a command to “go and do likewise” while welcoming others, but rather, an assurance of blessing in the course of discipleship. Jesus is saying, “I am with you, even as I send you out.”*

We so often want to see ourselves in the role of providing the hospitality or extending the welcome. In our homes we maintain nicely appointed guest rooms. In our office buildings we provide water coolers and magazines. In our congregations we devote entire committees to this work of welcome, making sure that those who visit us feel comfortable. And all of this is commendable work. But it also keeps us in a privileged position. Because we get to stay home. We get to stay on our own turf, in our own comfort zones. We welcome people into our world on terms that we have created.

***How might this text change if we view ourselves AS the disciples rather than as those providing hospitality TO the disciples? If we view ourselves as the missionaries rather than those receiving the missionaries? What might it mean if we are part of communities that are sent out into the world to be missionaries of the Gospel? If we view ourselves as the ones being sent rather than just being willing to receive or support those who are sent by someone else?***

In our world, we want to see missionaries as special people who are able to drop everything and go serve in some far off country. We send our youth on “mission trips” across the country or across the globe. Mission work becomes something for someone else to do. In this understanding, mission work is confined to certain times and places. Two weeks ago, representatives from the Southwest Minnesota Synod gathered at Gustavus for the annual Synod assembly. The theme throughout the assembly was looking at our local contexts in light of the needs of the world. ***The world with all its needs is at our doorstep, right now.*** We were challenged to think about how mission and discipleship is being lived out in our communities right now, because we are all missionaries and we are all disciples. I commend your work of welcoming our Methodist brothers and sisters into our building, as well as numerous community groups. I commend your work of welcome as a Reconciling in Christ congregation. But I also challenge you to continue to imagine all the ways that we can turn outwards towards the other. We are living in a time of great possibility for mission work and our congregation is excited about discipleship. We like the disciples are sent out for the work of proclaiming the Gospel.

But it costs us something to be a disciple. It costs us our very selves. It costs us our comforts. To follow Jesus even means to lose your own life. In the Gospel text read today Jesus talks about rewards. The ways that we serve others do not help us rack up heavenly bonus points that will pay some great dividend someday. That is applying the values of the world to God’s kingdom. The reward that Jesus speaks about is not about something that will happen some day if we do all the right things now. Nor is he talking about a life full of happiness and contentment from the sheer joy of altruism. Instead, we have already received the blessing that Jesus walks among us. God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ, and as we testify to that good news, we know that we are blessed with abundance beyond our imagining.

People of God, we are all missionaries. That is the charge that we are given by Jesus Christ. We are called to serve one another and we are called to bear witness to the creating, redeeming, and sustaining work of God in this world. We do not have to do it alone, but we are commanded to do it. God bears with us even when the work seems impossible. God shows up again and again to walk with us.

We as individuals are called to be disciples, but we are also part of missionary communities. As we go out from this place today, I challenge you to think about how you are living out YOUR calling as a missionary. How are WE as a congregation living out our calling to be a missionary community? Go therefore and be disciples AND make disciples.