

**Deuteronomy 10:12-19**

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

**Matthew 25:31-46**

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

**Romans 12:9-13**

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

**“Welcome Home, O Wayfaring Stranger”**

**Rev. David Dalke & Stacy Miller**

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"O Wayfaring Stranger." I'm going to give her a card. We all have it. It says, "I'm glad you're here." I want you to have that. Because we need our doors to be open to the wayfaring strangers. We need our doors to be open to the people who are in our midst, like the people Moses spoke to. As he looked at those people of Israel, a bunch of wayfaring strangers, and he said to them, "You need to welcome people. You need to welcome people in your midst, because once you were a stranger, and you were welcomed, and now it's your turn." In essence, "Don't forget," he said, "where you came from. Don't forget where you came from. Don't forget Sarah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They welcomed you. Now it's your turn to welcome the wayfaring stranger in your midst."

Gary Adamson was an entrepreneur, he created Air Midwest airlines, many of you might have flown on that airline years ago. It was a little commuter airline, would go into the communities of Colorado and Nebraska and Kansas and he would pick up passengers and fly them into the hubs, the major, the big airports. And many of us enjoyed that and appreciated that. We didn't have to drive into certain places, and so he would take us in. And his airline grew, and it grew, and it grew, and finally at one of the board meetings Gary announced to his board members, "I've decided to not fly out of those little communities any more in Kansas and Colorado and Nebraska. I've decided I just want to fly out of the major airports now. My airline is big, and I can buy bigger planes and fly out of the major hubs. I don't need...." He got about that far, and one of his board members said, amidst the silence, he said, "Gary, I think you've forgotten where you came from. I think you have forgotten what got you here. You have forgotten the strangers."

You know, Jesus, in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think Jesus is really telling the story. He talks about a king and the king gathers all the nations around, it's all symbolic language, gathers all the nations, but on the left side the king puts the goats and on the right side the king puts the sheep. I'm sure that's Jesus speaking, because he was a shepherd. And so, look at the people on the right side, the sheep. The king says, "You are blessed. You are blessed, because when I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. And when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. And when I was the stranger in your midst, when I was the one looking for support and hope, you reached out and your doors were open to me. And when I was naked, you clothed me, and when I was sick, I'm sure in today's vernacular, you gave me a cup of soup. And when I was in prison, you came to see me. Blessed are you," he said. "Blessed are you. Because you see," he said, "as you have done this unto all those people that walked into your doors, you did it, and you honored me."

And then he looked at the goats on his left side over here and he said, "You know, when I was hungry, you didn't give me anything to eat. When I was thirsty, you ignored me. And when I was a stranger and I needed you, you locked your doors and you kept me out. When I was naked you didn't give me anything to wear when it was cold out there, and when I was sick, you didn't nurture me. When I was in prison, you did not come to see me." And then he said, "You will be punished. You will be punished." Now, that sounds a lot like a Scripture of judgment. It sounds like Jesus is talking about our eternity, but I

think that misses the point totally. I think this is a Scripture of encouragement, a Scripture of people wanting to reach out to others, a Scripture of caring and love. It's a Gospel, that's what it is, a Gospel of love right there in front of us.

I was at the hospital the other day. We all take our turns, we go up to be there, and we carry a book with us that has all of you in it. We read to see if any of you are in the hospital. They give us a book there at the hospital, it's a gray book, and they hand it to us so we compare. We open the gray book, we get all the denominations, we go to Methodist, and then we look and see does anybody correspond... There's always a couple of young women behind the desk. They hand the gray book to you and so I walked in, they said "Here's the book, David." I said, "Thank you very much" and I'm thumbing through, and I'm feeling a little awkward because there are quite a few people listed, and I didn't know how many of you were in it, so I started to kind of carry on a conversation, sort of senseless a little bit, and I said, "You know, sometimes when I'm looking through this book and I see down here, let's see, Sally, she's in Room 3015, and then when I go upstairs to see her and I go in to the room and I kind of creep in the room just a little bit and peer around the corner so I don't disturb, and I look in and there's nobody there." I told these young women, I said, "There's nobody there. In fact the bed is freshly made and the room is sterilized." I said, "I always wonder...so I usually go to the nurse's station and say to them, "Sally? 3015? Did she go home?" To which one of the women behind the desk looked at me and said, "Or go home?"

We all need a home. We need a home. We need a place. We need the doors to open right here, and this is our home. We need that place where we can come in and just be who we are and be ourselves, and ask some of those questions that we may not want to ask anybody else, like why's the sky blue and where does the white go when the snow melts? Have you ever wondered those things? We need a place where we can just say "Who am I and what am I? What's my purpose, and will I know my mom and dad when I die? Will I get a second chance?" and all those questions. We need a home where we can ask those things. We need a place with no pretense, no pretense, where I can enter the door as the wayfaring stranger, and I can enter the door regardless of my gender, regardless of my ethnicity and my background or my history, regardless of my sexual orientation. I can find my place, and this is it. This is our place. A place where we can talk about peace, and justice, and civility, and how we treat one another. We need a home.

A year ago this past summer, Rebecca and Ross Loomis and myself, went with 23 of our college students into the streets of San Francisco, walking the streets with people who needed a home. Who needed someone to care for them. And there was a church in the Tenderloin area of San Francisco, down the street, on the corner of Ellis and Taylor. And they were caring for these people, and we became part of that community for a week. And we would serve food to them. And we would reach out to them as best we knew how, and we sat with some woman from the staff from Glide Memorial Church and she looked at us and said, "It is difficult to know what to do sometimes, for the stranger. It is difficult to know how to care for them, but if nothing else, just love them. Care for them. Greet them and smile." Not unlike what happened to our high school students this year. This summer they went off into eastern Kansas and hung out in a community and built a

wheelchair ramp for somebody who was disabled and put a fence around a day care center and painted houses and cleaned up yards and then we sat down in this downtown church in a basement in a place called the Jubilee Café. The Jubilee Café, and we cooked, and people came in to eat, and they sat there, and we sat at the table with them, and we talked. Children, young people, families, single folks, because they needed a home. They needed the doors open and they were open. They needed a home.

Well you know, there's something else, too. Life isn't always smooth. I'd like to think it's without very many bumps or flat tires, life just isn't always smooth, and we need a place to open our doors for people when life is so out of order. When life feels so out of order, and it happens when we least suspect it. Our wayfaring stranger goes home and their house is burning. Someone else gets a diagnosis, and it's scary. Somebody in the family is not coming through very well, they just feel like they're fractured in this family. Relationships are hurting, fragmented. When we least expect it sometimes. I sat there last week and listened to Chuck talk about 9/11, I was sitting and I was just watching all of us. Every now and then I would start to think about, I drifted for a moment, I thought I know what happened to me. Yeah, Fort Wayne, Indiana, ten years ago. September 11, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The three-day workshop. This was the second day. We were doing a workshop on how to be sane, how to have balance in your life, personally and professionally and family and every other way, and talk about good self-care, and that was it, and then we glue ourselves to a TV and a woman in our group starts crying because her son is in the army and she said "I don't know what this means for him" and we just sat for a day, a second day, we put everything on hold, and the third day we quit early. We just quit early. And I remember walking back to the hotel and I knew I couldn't fly out of there, I didn't know how I was going to get back to Colorado, and I asked a man behind the counter at the hotel "Can you shuttle me to the airport" and he said "Sure" and they took me out and I go to the airport and walk in there and I say to a man behind a counter renting cars, "Do you have any cars available?" He said, "We do" and I said "I need to get at least to Iowa. My daughter's in Bettendorf, Iowa. If I can drive there, but remember it's a one way." I said, "I can't bring your car back. This is one way." He said, "Take it, take it, it's fine, take it. No charge," he said. "No charge for one way." Late that night I'm going through Chicago and I'm hungry and thirsty, feel like a wayfaring stranger, feel like I'm not sure what's going on and I go through this drive-through and I say to the young woman, I order, she hands me my food and I start to say "How much" and she says "You can have it." I say "No, no." She said, "Take it." And I start to pull away and she looks at me and she says, "Please be careful."

All of us, when life is so out of order, personally, in the nation, wherever, we need a place, the doors, we need them to be open. But you know, that was ten years ago we were talking about this, but something else happened ten years ago. Something else happened ten years ago that very year, in January. January 27. And we talked about that one time in here just briefly. Because we talked about Kyle Keller, because Kyle Keller was the assistant basketball coach at Oklahoma State University. But we didn't talk much about his nephew Nate. Nate Fleming. Because you see, Nate Fleming graduated from high school. He was five feet ten inches tall and nobody wanted him on their team and Kyle the assistant coach at Oklahoma State with Eddie Sutton says, "You know Nate, I think

you ought to come out for the team. You ought to try out because Eddie likes that Coach Sutton likes people that are walk-ons, number one, and that run a hundred miles an hour and push those starters and has a don't-quit attitude, and he said that's you. Try out. Maybe you can make the team." And Nate made the team, and they came out here January 27, 2001. And they went to Boulder and played a Big 12 game against CU and when the game was over they started to get in their planes to go back. Remember? When Eddie Sutton went up to Kyle Keller and said, assistant coach, he said "You know what? I need to talk to you about this game. And you're on the other plane. So I want you to trade. Trade with your nephew. Ask Nate if he'll ride the other plane, and you ride with me." And so Nate got on the other plane, the plane that crashed in eastern Colorado and Nate died, along with the media director, the play-by-play announcer, publicist, the trainer, another ball player, and a community in Stillwater Oklahoma was sent into utter despair, and people went to their knees and Zane and Anne Fleming held each other in disbelief about their son. Their life now was in shambles. It was so out of order, and services were held all that week in neighboring communities and people remembered and dried and people came through doors that were open and strangers held one another and the church spoke. Because things were so out of order. Life was out of order, and our wayfaring stranger sang it to us coming down this aisle. She said "Sometimes the clouds are dark and gloomy, and sometimes the road is rough and steep. But I'm still going, that's right. I'm still a-goin. I'm going over Jordan and I'm just a goin' over home."

The church needs to open their doors always, and life takes those turns. When life is not so smooth but it's out of order. And Moses said, "You now, it's your turn," he said. "The people that have come before you have invited you into their midst, and now here you are, and it's your turn to welcome the strangers. Now it's your turn," he said. And Jesus said, "It's a moral imperative. It's a moral imperative to feed, to offer water, to clothe, to visit, to open your doors to the stranger. It's a moral imperative," he said. We all need a home. We need a place when life is so out of order that we can call ours and feel supported. And with that, I want to invite our wayfaring stranger to become a part of this community of faith. I want to invite her to be a part of us, to take the vows that the rest of you took right here, so Stacey if you join me for a moment. What I offer to her is, as we embrace you, will you embrace us now with your own prayers and your presence, with your gifts and your service, so you can answer "I will" and all of God's children said "Amen." I would like to invite all those now that joined today, if you would come forward and just line up here with us please. Would you please come now? And I'll ask you to face everybody that you see up here. You want to just turn and look at all those folks and what I would like for all of us to do, I'd like for us to spend just a moment, just a moment in reflection, a moment of silence, of what it means to reach out, to reach out to each other, to be the church to one another, to have the doors wide open for each one of us. Let's pause for just a moment please.