

**Isaiah 61: 1-4 Romans 15: 1-2, 5-7 Rev. Janet Chapman 4/27/25**

**Kellen Roggenbuck notes that there are many things that Jesus did exceptionally well that we as modern followers should embrace. We call this “discipleship,” which includes praying, teaching, learning, and growing...all the things we want to be more Christlike in. But there is one area around which I believe we need to discern a more engaged call, especially as the church: reaching the alienated. Now, I can imagine what you're thinking: "Isn't everyone a little alienated these days?" And you're not wrong. We live in an increasingly fragmented and polarized world riddled with loneliness. It is the #1 problem of the next generation according to social psychologists, not to mention the Surgeon General's national study of few years ago. People are retreating into their own echo chambers and building walls instead of bridges, especially as our nation grows more divided.**

**But I'm not just talking about the general sense of alienation that permeates our culture. I'm talking about the folks who are on the fringes of society, the ones who feel like they don't belong anywhere, the ones who have been rejected, marginalized, or forgotten especially by the church. Whether it is implicitly or explicitly, perception or reality, the number of people who have felt alienated by the church is on the rise.**

**These are the people Jesus spent most of his time with. The lepers, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the outcasts. The ones who were considered "unclean" or "unworthy" by the religious establishment. These were the people unwelcome at the temple or the synagogue, turned away by the religious leadership. And yet, Jesus saw something in them that no one else did. He saw their potential, their worth, their humanity, their divine creation. He welcomed them into his circle of friends, ate with them, healed them, called them, equipped and empowered them, and loved them unconditionally.**

**So, how do we, as modern-day followers of Jesus, reach out to the alienated in our own communities? Consider these points:**

**Go to them. We need to be willing to go where they are. This might mean stepping outside of our comfort zones, venturing into unfamiliar territory, and engaging with people who are different from us. It might mean visiting a homeless shelter, volunteering at a prison ministry, or attending a support group for LGBTQ+ youth. It might mean having difficult conversations about race, politics, or religion where we are not the ones in trust authoritative positions. This is where the people are, and we see the scripture full of examples of Jesus going to the people on the fringes. If we actually want to engage like Christ did, we need to be willing to meet them where they are, on their terms, and listen to their stories with compassion and empathy.**

**Can you name this theme song? (Cheers) What if the church were like Cheers; where everybody's name mattered? Consider with me what that would look like – called to create spaces where people can say “I am loved, I am valued, I am seen”. By doing so, we bring heaven to earth. When we proclaim the words of Isaiah, and live them out, we are activating our connection with God's people.**

**Another way to live out Isaiah's words is by Checking your heart. You need to be willing to challenge your own assumptions and biases. We all have them, whether we like to admit it or not. And they can often get in the way of building genuine relationships with people who are different from us. We need to be honest about our own prejudices and blind spots. Let's ask ourselves hard questions about why we feel the way we do about certain groups of people, both as individuals and the church. The only way to do this successfully is to, through our discernment, be open to the possibility that our views might need to change.**

**Be radical in your hospitality. This means welcoming everyone into our communities, no matter what their background, beliefs, or lifestyle choices and especially those who are the least, the last, and the lost among us. It means creating safe spaces where people can be themselves, without fear of judgment or rejection. It means sharing**

meals, stories, and laughter with people who might not look like us, think like us, or act like us. The hardest part about this is as soon as you begin to do it, you will find an influx of people that immediately occupy that new space in ways that exercise that radical hospitality.

Speak truth to power. Every Christ follower's responsibility is to call out injustice and oppression wherever we see it, even (and perhaps especially) when it's happening within our own churches or communities. Maybe especially when it's happening in our own hearts and minds. It means advocating for the marginalized, standing up for the oppressed, and working towards a more just and equitable society for all. It means using the support, connection, and privilege within the faith community to walk with those whose voice needs centering. Now, I know this is a lot to ask. It's not easy work, and it's not always fun. But it's essential work, if we want to live out the gospel in a way that's relevant and meaningful to the world around us. And it is likely what God is calling you and our church to do if you are willing to discern. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound"* - Isaiah 61:1

This is the calling of the church. To bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to open the prison doors to those who are bound. Faithful discernment will lead your church to this calling, and faithful disciples follow the call of God. So, let's get to work. Let's go out into the world and show the cast out that they are not alone, that they are loved, and that they have a place in God's kingdom and our church. Let's be the church that Jesus envisioned— A church that welcomes everyone, loves unconditionally; A church that works tirelessly for justice and peace; A church for the least, the last, and the lost; A church that follows where God leads. It is covenant over contrast, community over isolation, communing with each other over division.