“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.”

I come to you in the name of God, the Holy Trinity – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

For the past several weeks the appointed Gospel reading for Sunday has been a portion of Matthew, chapter 10. In this chapter, Jesus instructs and encourages the disciples as together they review “The Official Divine Mission Training Manual”.

Jesus begins with a description of their mission: “To cure disease, cast out unclean spirits, and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Then they spend a lot of time getting direction from Jesus about the methods – how to do their work, and what response to expect from their efforts.

Here are some of Jesus’ instructions. Don’t take a lot with you, which means - pack lightly. No need for extra cash, no extra purse or bag to carry your stuff. Bring only what you’re wearing - no change of shoes and clothes. Greet everyone you meet along the way in peace. Depend on the kindness of others - strangers - to provide the basic things you will need, like food and shelter. When you are not received in peace, shake off the dust from your feet and move on.

Take heed of my warning: Remember - this is God’s holy work. It is loving, liberating, life-giving work. But it’s demanding and difficult work. Be careful, be wise out there! And don’t try to go it on your own. You will feel at times like sheep surrounded by wolves. Expect challenges, resistance, opposition, hostility even to this message. Don’t be surprised if divisions erupt in families when they learn about the mission. Some family members will hear and accept what you have to say as the inspired work of God, and will want to join you. Other members of the same family will not agree at all. They will turn against each other and blame you. They will resent your interference. Be prepared for conflict and chaos. This mission of bringing healing, hope, forgiveness, and justice will shake up the status quo. Many will not welcome the intrusion, the suggestion that you are offering an alternative, possibly even a “new” normal for their lives.

If you are to endure the rigors of this work, daily you will need to practice the discipline of dwelling with God and meditating on this main message: God has sent me, Jesus, in love to the world and for the world. We have spent precious time together. You have been with me, lived with, and learned from me. You know me, so you know the nature and character of the God who sent me.
“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.”

I have come to the world as a human being, just like you. Living with you, experiencing life as you do, together we human beings contend with a life of vulnerability. A life full of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. A finite life which no human being can completely bend to his or her own control. Many will think that to choose to be vulnerable is a sign of weakness. But, vulnerability is not the same thing as weakness. “Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.” (Brene Brown. Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead. New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012).

Here’s my promise: There will be those who welcome you and show you hospitality. When you experience that kind of reception, believe and know that I am present in that moment with you. That stranger is welcoming me in welcoming you. And it is God’s face you will see when you look in their eyes and see their smile of understanding and kindness. Do not be hesitant or afraid to receive their cold cup of kindness, cup of caring, cup of compassion, when they offer it to you. Receive it with gladness and gratitude; for these are blessings come directly from the Divine, the holy God. The humble hospitality, the warm welcome you will receive comes from hearts overflowing. Hearts that have to share what they have received.

To choose vulnerability and to receive gratefully is at the heart of what it means to be my disciple, an apprentice and an apostle. This is what the flow of God’s grace looks like - the generosity of the Holy Spirit alive and at work for good in all things. That flow of grace is, and will always be the reward of faithful, courageously vulnerable disciples. That flow of love, holiness, and joy will be your reward.

Several weeks ago we received an email in the church office. It read: “Greetings! Sadly, I'm writing to let everyone know we, the Harubin's (Elizabeth, Danny, Charlotte, and Rowan) are moving to sunny Charleston, SC (not so sad about the sunny bit). Alas, as many of you know, Danny is active duty Army and received change of station orders this past March. We're leaving this next Friday coming up, June 12th.

I'm sorry we won't be able to say goodbye in person. I'm a veteran myself so I've been doing this moving thing for awhile and it never gets easier.

Thank you all for the warmth and love you have shown us, especially the girls. Charlotte has asked several times if we can go back to church soon to see the grandpas and grandmas. We didn't have family here, so it was especially nice having familiar faces every week. I hope you all know how fondly you will be remembered. You will be remembered and in our prayers. Please pray for us in our transition. Best – Elizabeth Parker”
What a blessing to have Elizabeth, our sister in Christ personally acknowledge the flow of grace that is constantly moving amongst us as God’s people, guiding and sustaining us as we carry Christ’s light and love into the world.

As Elizabeth requested of us, I close today’s sermon by offering a prayer for the Harubin family. Let us pray.

“Gracious God, we thank you for the work and witness of your servants Elizabeth and Danny, and their daughters Charlotte and Rowan, who have enriched this All Saints congregation and shared their gifts with us. Now bless and preserve them at this time of transition. Day by day, guide them and give them what is needed, friends to cheer their way, and a clear vision of that to which you are now calling them. By your Holy Spirit be present in their pilgrimage, that they may travel with the one who is the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

(Evangelical Lutheran Prayer Book for the Armed Services, p. 138)