

Jeremiah 28:5-9; Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Rom 6:12-23; Matt 10:40-42

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – July 2, 2017

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Last Sunday we worshipped outside at Heads Up! Hartford. We came together as one across our many differences in faith traditions, in race, in ethnicity, in belief, in age, in socioeconomic circumstance, etc. Our theme for the week was *understanding*. The young people on our worship team acted out the Gospel lesson powerfully, and one of them wrote the following poem that was read during the service. Camper Amira offered the following poem entitled “It’s Hard to Understand.”

“It’s hard to understand when....  
We appreciate looks over personality,  
Color over equality,  
Crime over justice,  
Science over religion,  
and Violence over peace.

Understanding is a power that everyone seeks, but not all can find. In life we make mistakes, but we often blame others. YOU made the decision to make that mistake. We often point the finger when we misunderstand ourselves.

Truth is some of us were not made to understand because we more so need to be understood ourselves.

God has created us NOT to be perfect, but to understand why we are the way we are.

I think it's okay....

To bend the rules,  
To live life,  
To be free,  
and to learn how to understand differences that we see spreading us apart rather than keeping us together.

Life is hard to understand but with God's guidance and love, we are always understood."

Because the *Heads Up! Hartford* theme was *understanding*, we challenged each other during camp around difference as we worked together, learned together, played and prayed together. Evening programs brought a TED talk from Nigerian born Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who talked about "The Danger of a Single Story." From Chimamanda we learned about not making assumptions about another, not seeing a single story in the other or in us. A young Myanmar refugee spoke to us about coming to this country totally alone at age 18. Her courageous journey inspired and taught us about the enormous challenges a refugee faces to come to our shores. Another night we had 4 deaf teens and the Director of the American School for the Deaf talk to us about what it is like to live as a deaf

person. One young man joyfully signed, “I’m proud to be deaf!” From them we learned how to welcome and honor a deaf person and not offend. After each of these programs we gathered into our teams for conversation. The insight coming out of the mouths of teens always inspires and calls me to be better. They have prophetic voices that Jeremiah describes—the prophets that speak peace and strive for understanding.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me,” Jesus said to his disciples. Jesus sends you and me out to welcome all that we meet and all who enter our doors. It’s very easy to welcome people who are like us. I think we always need to be asking ourselves about who is welcomed here and in our hearts. What are our filters? What are our expectations around people? How do we love all who come into our lives? When we welcome the stranger, we welcome the Christ, no matter what they look like or how they sound or what their circumstance.

Jesus invites us to take the love we have for those closest to us and to share it—to extend it broader and wider, particularly to those we may not understand. Welcome the stranger and learn about the other.

We had many brand new campers at *Heads Up! Hartford* who came into camp as strangers. Together the camp came to a deeper understanding of those very different from one another. They left camp with the magic of friendships that only come when we open ourselves up to understanding another and not making

assumptions. They grew to love each other and accept each other simply because they saw that we are all God's children.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” May you embrace these words of Good News as you go out into your world and live them, for the “you” in Jesus’ words is us.