

## YOUTH/CAMP SUNDAY 2016 –

My part in this Youth Sunday has to do with camps. Camp has been a part of my life since the summer of 1982 when I was entering my junior in High School. In fact, I've spent a total of 113 weeks at camp since then which adds up to two years and two months of my life. Every few years I say, "I'm too old for this" and take a break vowing to let the younger ministers and leaders direct, counsel, keynote, and serve as chaplains. But then I get sucked back in again as I did this year when I co-directed CYF Camp. See, it's not as easy to say, "no" when you have the opportunity to have a "dream-team" staff as I have this past two years. This year, my co-director was Rachelle Ryness who is Ellis Martin's granddaughter ... he was one of your substitute preachers this summer. I had Katy as chaplain. Haley Corbett, who is now the director of the Region's youth program was one of my girl's counselors. Carl Cordes, who was the youth director before her was a boy's counselor. Charlotte Thompson, who preached here last year. Carl Crain who is multi-year veteran of camps here in the Region and one of those musicians who makes everyone else in the band sound good. And to top it all off, Sandhya Jha, Director of Oakland Peace Center, author of two must-read books on anti-racism, and former Regional Staff person here in Nor-Cal was my keynoter! We had about five languages represented among the kids including Farsi, Czech, French and an African tribal language that I can't remember what Brandy called it. We had Asian kids, Hispanic kids, African kids, African-American Kids, Middle-Eastern kids ... it was by far the most diverse camp I've been to in this region.

And this was a good thing, because the theme of this year's camps was, "Welcomed to the Table," which emphasized the importance of Jesus' followers practicing radical hospitality. In other words, doing whatever we can to carry on Jesus' ministry of creating safe, welcoming places for *everyone*. Now ... I could go on and on about all sorts of details about what we learned, but Sandhya showed us a video that I think summed up

the week nicely, and I want to share it with you. It's called "Radical Hospitality for the Rest of Us." [Show video]

For many years, we Christians have put emphasis on "belief." Do you "believe" in Jesus? What do you "believe" about Jesus? If you "believe" the right things, you can be "in." But if you *don't* "believe" the right things ... well ... tough. You're out of luck. And granted, Jesus talks about "believing" in him ... mostly in the book of John. A good example is John 12:44 when the author quotes Jesus, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me." Great. That was important to John in his presentation of the gospel. Of the seven times Jesus calls people to believe in him in the gospels, five of those times are right there in the Book of John. But do you know what we hear most from Jesus? It's not "*believe* in me," it's "FOLLOW me!" Twenty-two times in all four gospels! We get hung up on "belief" so much that we forget that it's more important to *follow* Jesus! It's also harder. And it requires *faith*. And it's not a once-and-for-all thing. It's a journey. That's why you'll hear our church describing the Christian life as a "journey of faith."

And that's where this table comes in. You're not required to "believe" to be welcomed here. Wherever you are in your journey, you have a place here among us. You are welcome. And you know what? We don't have this "radical hospitality" thing down pat. In fact no church past or present does. But we're continually working on it, and will *continue* to work on it, because there's no point in time where we can say, "Welp! We're here! We've arrived! Don't need to talk about this anymore or worry about it!" God is going to continually challenge us to open our doors ... and more importantly our hearts ... a little wider every day. That's why we come to this table every week, and that's why we practice what's called an "open table." Again, we don't require "belief ..." but our hope is that you grow in faith and be led to *follow* Jesus.