

Sunday Closest to June 29

Proper 8

Year A

Genesis 22:1-14

Psalm 13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

“The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.” I’m sure this slogan is not new to you.

These Episcopal Church signs dot cities across the nation, our own just on the corner of Park and Glenarm. This mantra is not new to the denomination either, and with some digging around, I found it has been around since at least the 1970’s. But it’s not just a slogan or a building or a denomination to which we’re inviting folks. Yes, we welcome all to this inclusive community at St. Andrew’s, but to think theologically about welcome is more than just saying hello to one another, guests and friends, alike on Sunday morning. Archbishop Michael Curry says “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You,” is not just a slogan, it’s who we seek to be and the witness we seek to make, following the way of Jesus.¹”

We talk a lot about welcome here at St. A’s- welcoming guests, welcoming and accepting all just as they are, welcoming each person to God’s holy table. For a moment, remember a time you felt welcomed. Or put it this way, remember a

¹. <https://www.episcopalcafe.com/the-episcopal-church-welcomes-you/>

time you felt seen, noticed, heard. What did that feel like? Our world pushes us to isolate ourselves and one another, and God pulls us back into connection.

What do you recall about that moment?

Hospitality and welcome - it's one of our Christian values, and one we take very seriously not just to grow the church or increase our numbers here. The church can get sucked into consumer culture as much as the rest of the world. The marketplace of welcoming is huge- programs, consultants, articles, blog posts. And it's huge because no doubt it is important. Crucial even. But if we forget the theology of welcome, the "why" we're doing it, none of the rest matters.

The past few weeks on Sundays we've heard bits of Jesus' mission sermon and the sending out of the twelve- in Matthew. A guideline of sorts, Jesus offers words of wisdom as they prepare to share about God's kingdom in the world. Brand new for each of them, Jesus wants to send them forth with what they might expect and how to approach different situations. The disciples are chosen and given very specific instructions for their work- to whom they are being sent, what to bring, warnings about division instead of unity, preaching about the kingdom and healing.

In Jesus' conclusion of his message today, he ends with what welcome and hospitality looks like. One translation I like is that instead of the word welcome, the word is translated as receive. A rabbinic principle, when one receives a messenger, you receive who they represent. It's about remembering when we show welcome, when we receive those strangers; we receive them as Jesus would. With open hearts, loving kindness, and grace. When a guest walks through our doors or say sleeps on our grounds, we want to share with them about what they'll find here. This community. The ministries and ways to grow in God's love. The value that all are truly welcome. But one of the many gifts we receive as hosts when we receive all as our brothers or sisters is that we ourselves are the recipients of something sacred- a human being, created in the image of God, bringing with them a story- their lives, hopes, dreams, heart ache. We receive a beautiful gift of openness to discover how God can dwell within them, and we are welcome to hold on to struggles or what they may seek.

Church developer Daniel Rivera would call this relationship of receiving as mutual transformation. I'm reminded of this Celtic Rune: we saw a stranger yesterday, we put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, music in the listening place, and with the sacred name of the Triune God, he blessed us and our house, our cattle and our dear ones. These disciples were sent forth to proclaim a new

way of living and at the same time, they were the ones being welcomed into new towns and homes. They were the ones knocking on doors. It's almost as if Jesus is encouraging them here- preparing the world for those he sent. Reminding those that receive guests, they, too, will be deeply blessed by the message they bring. And in turn, those that are sent will be blessed by their hospitality.

We are a welcoming place here. Our building allows light to stream in to illuminate and be a place of solace and comfort to all who enter. Our music exclaims the power of God's transcendent love in our lives. We gather around a table to participate in the Eucharist, knowing that we join a world-wide community doing the same. And yet, with any Christian value, it's good to revisit it and examine how, even if it's simply offering one more glass of water, we can dwell deeper in God's compassionate hospitality. It's not just a ministry of our greeters, but how each us notice when a guest comes among us, sharing the peace and sharing conversation in coffee hour.

When both parties, the guest and the host, receive one another, we are each shown the divine love of God. But, try as we might, sometimes our humanity slips in and we don't offer the best we have to offer. And so I wonder, was there a

time in your life that you didn't feel welcomed? Received and loved as who you are? A time when you didn't feel seen or noticed?

Whenever a new person enters our lives, even for a moment that is an opportunity for relationship and connection. To avoid those feelings that one isn't seen. Jesus sent the disciples out to create this very same relationship and connection as he has with God. And by sending them in his name, those that meet the disciples will know Jesus through them. He calls his group of followers to be disciples in the world. To be a part of God's mission. To receive those who are weary, carrying heavy burdens, who are thirsty. And Jesus invites us to do the same. Because "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You," is not just a slogan, it's who we seek to be and the witness we seek to make.