

Sermon Dorset Ch July 2, 2023 B Communion

Psalm 89: 1-4, 15-18 *I will sing the story of your love, O LORD, forever. I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.*

Matthew 10: 40-42 *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward. NRSV*

Last week, we heard from Jeremiah and John Lewis, a modern-day prophet, with a focus on the God of justice who is angry at injustice and evil in our world. The sermon today is about God's welcome to all.

I have a vivid memory of receiving a welcome. When I was 8 years old, my parents were attending a conference in Dayton, Ohio. They left me that summer afternoon in the care of a college student who supervised a neighborhood playground. When I went with her to the playground, I was surprised (even in a bit of a shock) to realize that she and I were the only ones with white skin. All the other children at the playground had black or brown skins. I stood a bit timidly by the side where kids were swinging on swings and busy playing. Then a young boy about my age came over to me and said, "Would you like to go on the teeter totter?" I would and we did.

I had a new friend for the afternoon.

Nothing I have done or can do in the future for civil rights and welcoming people of different backgrounds will make up for the overwhelming and distinct welcome this 8-year-old experienced that day.

Scriptures say a lot about welcoming each other, including strangers or aliens in our midst. Abraham welcomed strangers to his tent and invited them to a meal. It is said he had entertained angels unawares.

With a nomadic background in an often harsh and unforgiving Environment people of the Ancient Near East shared a strong tradition of offering hospitality to others, including strangers.

Jesus welcomed people whom others thought were beneath them and their principles.

Matthew wrote the gospel that bears his name some forty years after Jesus had been crucified. Jesus' instructions to his disciples were also to the followers of his own community and to us saying, "*Proclaim the good news. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*"

Jesus is sending his disciples on mission. When they travel, preach, teach, and heal, it is Christ whose work will be done by their hands. **The world will meet Jesus through them.**

When we personally think of meeting Jesus in human form, the words of Matthew 25 call us to see Christ in other people, *in the least of these* especially those who are hungry and

thirsty, and lonely, without clothing or shelter, or in prison, and otherwise in need.

But a person in need is not the only way Christ appears in our world. In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus appears not so much as a person who is hungry or homeless but as a disciple empowered to go forth. And, as Jesus speaks to each of us. Jesus is not only visible in others, in people outside us. **We can also see him in us. When we look in the mirror, we will see his face looking back.** *Pause*

It is our privilege and our responsibility to make Christ visible. We cannot reflect his face if we stay at home, among those we know. **Christ is made visible in the act of welcoming,** in giving and receiving **hospitality**. If we never meet and talk with strangers, Jesus has no opportunity to be seen as showing God's welcome.

The Rev. Liddy Barlow serves as the director of a regional ecumenical agency. Her role is *a ministry of representation*. When she shows up at annual conventions, ordinations, or at Holy Week services, she comes as a visible representative **of the church universal**. She brings with her **'the prayers of the wider church.'**

She tries to worship in a congregation in each of their member church groups at least once a year; in part to increase her knowledge of the different church traditions her agency serves. Before doing this work, she had never been to a Salvation Army worship service, or a Byzantine Catholic

liturgy; she'd never spent Sunday morning at an African-American Baptist Church.

She had never attended a Chrism mass, where consecrated oil is used for anointing. She said she was unsure of what was expected, perhaps 'worried about standing when everyone else was sitting, and unsure of unfamiliar songs.

She was afraid that she would not be welcome.

The opposite was true. 'On the Wednesday of Holy Week, she went to a small Antiochian Orthodox church for a service of holy unction, anointing with consecrated oil.

She slipped into a pew, **a woman in a clerical collar, clearly a stranger**. The congregation stood as the small choir chanted, as the visiting bishop proclaimed the gospel, and as the priest's preschool-age daughter darted impishly around the sanctuary. They read seven different sets of scripture lessons related to healing and anointing, lighting a candle in a seven-branched candelabrum after each one.

She wrote, 'At last the time of anointing came. The priest explained the rite. Only Orthodox Christians may receive the oil, he said; it is a sacrament, and receiving sacraments implies theological agreement. But, he added, **his eyes finding mine**, if there are **any non-Orthodox visitors** in the room who would like to come forward, **we do have some myrrh** and would be glad to anoint you with that.'

‘Gratefully, she joined the line of the faithful, presenting herself before the priest with her open palms. He swapped one oil for the other. **“Thank you for coming,”** he said. He used a cotton swab to paint tiny crosses on her hands, her wrists, her forehead. The scent lingered as she returned to her pew.’

The Rev. Liddy Barlow grieves **the divisions in Christ’s church**, saying, ‘It is a tragedy that in many churches we cannot come to one communion table. **Our divisions make us strangers.**’ ‘But even within this **brokenness,**’ she reminds us, ‘there is a deep blessing.

Because we are strangers, we can welcome each other. Because we are not yet fully at home with one another, **we can extend hospitality.** In our welcome of others, Christ can be present in our midst, as we bear Jesus’ image to one another. We can bring God with us as we cross the threshold of an unfamiliar church, and we can find God reflected back to us in the welcome we receive there. We can dare to experience the unknown—trusting that alongside us, invisibly but truly, comes Jesus.’

From “Living the Word” p 21, Christian Century 6/7/2017

Taking Jesus into a situation does not mean having the answers. William Griffith of Columbus, Indiana is a hospital chaplain, who often visits people who are dying. He says, ‘Visitors to people who are dying don’t usually ask them questions unless they already

know the answers. In **his work caring for the dying**, he learned to do the opposite—to risk being surprised by the answers. His favorite question is to ask: “**When you are here all by yourself, what do you think about?**” This gives people permission to talk about what was important to them.

Early one morning he entered a hospice patient’s room. The medical director had asked him to visit, sensing some spiritual need that was making the man restless and depressed. The chaplain pulled a chair to the bedside, sat down, and introduced himself.

The patient stared at the wall and said nothing. After several minutes Griffith put his hand through the rails of the bed, placed it on top of his hand, and said, “When you are here all by yourself, what do you think about?” His lips began to quiver, and a tear formed at the corner of his eye.

(Keep voice flat, without emotion, as if hopeless)

“**I killed three men,**” *(pause)* he said softly. Chaplain Griffith said, “I don’t think I was ever more surprised by a patient’s response. I quietly asked, “**Would you like to tell me about it?**” He described in detail that moment during World War II when he had killed three young German soldiers. Eventually he asked, “**Will God forgive me?**”

By risking surprise, and asking a question, the hospice chaplain was able to help this man discover

the forgiveness he had been longing for.’

From Christian Century, 6/7/2017 p. 23 “Surprise.”

In *the Message*, a paraphrased translation of the scriptures are these words: (Jesus said) ***This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it.***

It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice.

You won’t lose out on a thing.

In a crowded subway car in one of our cities, a very pregnant woman got on, and no one **moved to offer her a seat. Then a woman wearing a hajib (the head covering worn by Muslim women)**, got up and offered the woman her seat. She gave a glass of cool water in God’s name.

On this 4th of July weekend, we remember our country’s heritage and tradition of welcoming immigrants to these shores. As Christians I’m glad we join people of other faiths in responding to God’s command to welcome the stranger and alien; to help those who are fleeing persecution and harrowing situations in their homelands.

Our hope is that the many who have been working hard to welcome and care for refugees, may know that their work is not fruitless, nor unrewarded in God’s eyes.

As we celebrate our nation's independence and hard-earned freedoms we can remember the words of the hymn

“This Is My Song.”

‘This is my prayer, O Ruler of all nations;
let thy reign come; on earth thy will be done.
In peace may all earth's people draw together,
and hearts united learn to live as one.’”

God welcomes all of us to this table this day.

As we celebrate coming to the Table of our Lord,
may we receive his welcome into our hearts and
share this welcome with all in God's world.

Amen.

Prayer of Pastoral Care Sunday, July 2, 2023

Psalm 89 says, "*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*" We pray in Jesus' name for the church, the world, and all who are in need, saying,

Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

Holy God of healing and peace, we thank you for life and health; for morning and evening, and for rain and sun.

We thank you for all you give us to sustain life; and most of all for Jesus, who lived and died and rose again, making real the promise of new life.

Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We ask, O God, for a church that ministers every day to bring people together in your name, for hearts that will not judge, for minds that recognize injustice and oppression in all its forms, and for hands that are open to answer your call. As we hear your Word this day, send your Spirit to equip us and inspire us, that your hospitality may be in the center of our lives.

Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

Merciful God, the peoples and nations you have called into being are many and full of marvels. We pray for their well-being. For nations and peoples in strife we pray for safety and peace. Be with the people of Ukraine in their fight for independence and freedom.

May your ways be known in all lands, including our own.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We pray for bodies and spirits healed, for those who are in pain, for those awaiting surgery, and for all facing challenges of mental and emotional health. May the gift of serenity be present to those living with addiction. Help us, O God, to be partners with you in communities of care. Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We lift up before you those on this church's prayer list.

Into your hands we place our prayers and all whose welfare we entrust to your care. Bless them and all who have needs only you can know. In thanksgiving for all your gifts, we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Let us remain seated as America, the Beautiful is sung by the Dorset BBQers.

OFFERING Jesus said, Truly I tell you, those who offer a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will not lose their reward. Beloved, let us offer to God the gifts of our lives and labor.

***DOXOLOGY**

***PRAYER** Faithful God. we give you thanks that you have entrusted us with the gift of hospitality and generosity. May our offerings this day draw us closer to you as we share them with others. In your mercy.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN ~~led~~ by the Dorset BBQers is *This Little Light of Mine*
~~We will follow their lead.~~ *Remain seated,*