

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: Matthew 10:40-42

Let us pray: God, you are our loving parent, grow us in the image of Christ as we seek to see others in the same manner. We pray this knowing that you are faithfully pushing and pulling us into that which we are yet becoming. For this we are thankful. Amen.

Today we find ourselves in the tenth chapter of Matthew during which the original twelve disciples from Galilee have expanded their work to involve many more other missionaries. In this chapter, we find Jesus training them as they are about to go out into the world.

It is interesting that Jesus begins their training by speaking about welcome. On the initial reading of these verses, it seems simple and straight forward, we may assume Jesus is saying, "Be welcoming to others!" but there is an underlying deeper meaning about what welcome involves for us today.

In recent decades, the idea of a "welcoming church," has been a priority to many churches. We boast about our open door policy. Even in front of our church, our banner conveys the idea that everyone has a seat at God's table. The Episcopal church frequently promotes opportunities for inter-religious dialog. We try to

make welcome here very practical by improving our Audio Visual technology and our website. Every month, we donate food for the hungry and unhoused to show our hospitality! All of these are theologically sound and virtuous, but Jesus is also speaking of a different kind of a welcome here in this passage.

Jesus is saying that not all welcome will be guaranteed to be accepted. Some people may embrace our welcome, while others don't. Some people may find our welcome even threatening. This is why Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

A prime example for me are the times I wear my priestly collar. A priest once told me that for some people, the collar is like a video screen in front of their eyes. You never know what images it brings up for them. It could bring up past traumas, it can represent guilt or hope. When I wear my collar at Blue Butterfly or at a City Hall meeting, people have their personal reactions. When I go on a hospital visit, it's not unusual that a few strangers will stop me to ask for prayers in the parking garage. Even hospital staff and nurses have their own reactions. Some nurses tell me how appreciative they are of my work, and want to be a chaplain themselves, while others find that I'm in their way. Patients either welcome a visit or are scared by my presence thinking that their doctor sent me there to tell them of some bad news.

Whether we wear a priestly collar or not, everyone Christian is a representative of God, we are all bearers of the “Good news,” but there’s no guarantee how people will react. But Jesus is preparing us to be ready.

Then Jesus continues to say, “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.”

The phrase, “In the name of,” may be hard to understand in modern times because we don’t often use that phrase anymore. What Bible scholars suggest we use is the word, “as.” So, what does it mean to welcome a prophet as a prophet and a righteous person as a righteous person? It could mean that we must recognize and accept their roles, their full identity, their calling, and their prophetic gifts and their contributions.

We need to welcome people who come through our doors with their special gifts and unique personalities. Especially when we may find it hard to understand who they are. It is like the passage in scripture that speaks about all the different parts of the body, and their unique functions, yet we need each other. We are reminded to work together and relearn what each person has to offer. I was discussing the topic of gifts with a vestry member recently. We were grateful that each vestry

member brings their own unique talents. Not all have an interest in finances, or children's ministry, or technology, if we are open, we can accept all the gifts everyone brings to this church.

It's important to be a church that is flexible with change. And change is guaranteed. Have you ever heard a term often used in a church? "It's not done that day." Even worst, in some large cathedrals where wealthy donors have pews named after them, if a visitor unknowingly sits in their pew, the family will ask them to sit elsewhere.

Jesus is asking us to live with radical welcome, a welcome that requires us to lay down our ego and prejudices. Our, "it's not done that way...". A welcome that will not discourage another and possibly become their stumbling block. A welcome that often requires us to do some self-examination.

In order for us to do this, it helps to recognize one another's holiness, no matter how odd we think someone is, how unconventional they operate, and how different they may think! Radical welcome forces us to discern what is right, instead of settling for what is easy or what we do not want to face.

Radical welcome doesn't only apply when we are at church. Everyday, people enter and exist our lives that require Christian radically welcomed. It may be helpful for us to ask ourselves, how would Jesus treat them? Are we willing to let down our judgements in order to learn the truth about ourselves? A great skill when learning radical welcome is imagining being the other person. How would I like being treated as...a transgender person. A person of color. An immigrant. An elderly person, with learning challenges, or being born poor?

When I was a teenager, and my father was the pastor of a Chinese evangelical church in the Silver Lake area of L.A., I remember a mentally challenged parishioner name Karl who came every Sunday that sat at the same spot. Karl had severe mental disability, and his mother was glad he had a church to go to and she often sent Karl to church alone. Karl had been attending this church even before my father started this church. As time when by, Karl's condition worsened. He became louder and more disruptive, and he was not caring for his hygiene either. Yet, we learned to welcome Karl. No one stopped attending because of his smell, and everyone knew he would have outbreaks or seizures. I'm not saying that it was easy for anyone, but somehow, my dad taught radical welcome. Karl may now be with God in heaven, but I hope Karl knows that he served as an angel to give us the opportunity to learn about radical welcome.

Jesus says, “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.” This little one was named Karl. But the verse has a part 2. But if you don’t welcome Karl or anyone who you choose not to, you are not welcoming God. Why did Jesus say this? Because everyone, the Karls of the world, the transgenders of the world, the immigrants of this world possess a sacred identity that is cherished and precious to God.

Lastly, radical welcome is not a one way street. There will be times when we will need radical welcome ourselves.

Jesus tells his disciples that the people who welcome them will be richly rewarded. Notice that Jesus is speaking about the ones who serve others. It’s not only about giving welcome, but it’s also about receiving welcome.

As your pastor, I am constantly aware of what burn out is. You all serve in many capacities, and encouragement is our fuel to keep going, we need to be fed by God’s word every Sunday and by the encouragement we give to each other.

It is not biblical to think that the church is meant to be run solely by the Priest. The body of Christ is the engine of the church, it is made up of the baptized. It is a

place for everyone to participate by learning and doing. The church is made up of everyone's talents... the one who hears the doorbell and opens the door for others. The one who hangs up the coats of others and who serves faithfully, who stay behind to close the doors, count the offering, tend to the sacraments, they are the ones who pour the cool drinks, and clear the tables. It's everyone's place to serve one another.

When Matthew refers to "Little ones," he is not only literally speaking about the children, but it is his term for "ordinary" Christians, equivalent to "disciples," and is used as a synonym for the people of God.

Giving a cup of cold water doesn't have to be complicated, it can be a simple gesture. It can mean developing the skill of giving a compliment, or receiving a compliment. There are times when we are so busy serving that we don't acknowledge each other's contribution, or say words of encouragement. Let's be a congregation that is generous with our compliments.

Saint Barnabas, was called "Son of Encouragement" by the apostles. His encouraging, diplomatic manner made a mark on the early church; it was Barnabas who vouched for Paul when the apostles were leery of the genuineness of Paul's conversion. Barnabas and Paul ministered together for more than a year, which

probably also required some peacemaking. Barnabas's gentle encouragement and ability to smooth over conflicts made him instrumental in growing and nourishing the early church.

May we all follow the example of Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement." We can all be encouragers, not just the priest, but everyone has that role. But it requires us to remove our ego and think of generous love, of radical love. It requires initiation and courage to say something kind to another person.

I was recently touched by the kindness of our two new baristas. Michelle and Jay's sons, Brady and John, discovered how to use our new Keurig coffee maker. After the service, they would come and take my coffee order. What brand of coffee do you like? Would you like sugar or milk? Sorry, we ran out of Peet's coffee.

Ephesians, says "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." Speaking the truth in love involves saying things like, "I appreciate you for all you are and do"... for planting all the beautiful flowers throughout our campus. For sending me a birthday card on behalf of the church...for hosting our summer socials in your house, and for preparing all our service programs. I thank you for baking bread for Holy Communion. There are so many kind gestures displayed at St.

Michaels, too much to mention here. These simple gestures mean a lot to the building up of the church. But saying something kind is like offering a “cup of cold water” we each need.

Jesus prepares us to go out into the world to be as “wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove,” this includes learning about what welcome means. I’m sure each disciple sent out encouraged each other every day. They were wise when welcome was not wanted, and they knew that radical welcome meant laying down their own insecurities so others may shine. Let us continue to be a welcoming church to visitors who enter our door and to each other who are within our doors. Amen.