

## Sermon Proper 8A 2014

'Welcome', It a very powerful word in our vocabulary. It is on the lips of Jesus in this morning's Gospel reading.

It can be used:

As a verb: 1. to affirm or greet the arrival of someone, especially by saying "Welcome!"

2. to accept something willingly or gladly. "We welcome suggestions for improvement."

Or as an adjective 1. One whose [arrival](#) is a cause of [joy](#); received with gladness; admitted willingly to the house, entertainment, or company. "*a welcome visitor*"

2. Producing gladness. "*a welcome present; welcome news*"

3. Free to have or enjoy gratuitously. *You are welcome to the use of my library.*

And as a noun

1. The act of [greeting](#) someone's [arrival](#), especially by saying "Welcome!"; reception.

2. The [utterance](#) of such a greeting.

3. Kind reception of a guest or newcomer. *We entered the house and found a ready **welcome**.*

Jesus in the gospel today speaks of a special kind of welcome. He calls us to holy welcome, i.e., extravagant hospitality.

To sincerely and generously welcome someone goes two ways. It says that you are receiving pleasure in the encounter and offering an invitation to them to come and participate in a wonderful experience.

You are anxious to share with them something you find important. You are also offering yourself, your own perception, something of your inner self in extending the welcome.

Jesus is telling us that as Christians it is an important part of our vocation to offer Welcome and Hospitality. The word vocation has as its root the Latin word *Voca* — to call. It's also the root for our word voice. Hence we speak of a vocation as a calling. In grammar words in the vocative case (such as commands Go, Stop, Come...) also share the same Latin word root. Inspiration is sometimes referred to as "A Voice from Heaven."

Jesus thus is calling, and commanding us to welcome people with a holy welcome founded on inner faith, hope and love. We may think of it simply as greeting someone at the back door of the church when they arrive. But it can be so much more profound when we consider that we are welcoming that person into a relationship with ourself and even more — a relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus' version of welcome is based upon the unconditional love of God for us. God loves us enough to overlook our wrongdoings. God loves us enough to pardon our offenses. God loves us enough to forgive.

Jesus says, paraphrasing slightly, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.. 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, these will definitely have their reward." That reward is eternal life. It's life not just after death, but transformation life here and now.

One of the great symbol of the United States is the Statue of Liberty. A portion of Emma Lazarus' famous poem about welcoming immigrants, which begins "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." is inscribed on a bronze tablet that hangs inside the statue's pedestal. I am certain that welcoming was meant in its most fullest sense. It inspired, lifted up, and gave hope to countless future citizens. This welcome to America had the power to transform the lives of immigrants with the promised hope of a chance for a better life thanks to the opportunities of freedom.

Here at Trinity I want to believe that welcome is given freely and honestly. It's something we concentrate on genuinely. The world has enough of retribution. The world has enough of aggression. The world has enough of terror. And how are we to respond? With hatred, malice, fear and prejudice? Or with love, forgiveness, mercy and faith?

I think we all know the answer. Not fear, not violence, not vengeance - but welcome, acceptance and love.

And it has to be on clear, transparent, terms. Occasionally, I hear words of criticism echoing from time to time among us. Let's be frank. Phrasing it as "constructive" doesn't mean it's painless. Often it is a veiled attempt to question people's motives instead of their actions. I wonder if we do it the same way with beloved family members? Are we gentler, or harsher? Are we hoping to change them? Could it be that the change actually needed is in our own hearts and minds.

When I hear such words, believe me, the speaker is actually revealing a tremendous amount about themselves at the same time. More than just their point of view, what comes across is their whole range of values, judgements and so on. When you care passionately about something, the question needing to be asked is: are you willing to collaborate and accommodate others who care just as much as you?

The answer is clear. We are given a choice. It's up to each and every one of us, each and every day we live. We can seek to oppress and control others, to amass power and even wealth, unwittingly serving the demons of this world. Or we can do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. We can affirm the goodness of creation and hold fast to a sacred trust to do no harm. And following the teaching of Jesus, we can welcome the stranger —offering not just hospitality but acceptance without judgement, giving without obligation and love without condition.

It's a choice indeed. Let us choose justice, Let us choose to offer a cup of water to one of those little ones in the name of God. Let us put our trust in God's mercy; and our hearts will be joyful because of God's saving help. We will sing to the HOLY ONE, who has dealt with us richly; though our ongoing choice for good, we will praise the Name of God Most High. Amen.