

“People of Hospitality” by Dr. Katelyn Brackney

Sermon for Meadowbrook Congregational Church

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“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”⁴¹ 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,⁴² 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.”

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Our text this week is pretty short, especially compared to the text I preached from the earlier part of Matthew 10 a couple of weeks ago (yay!). And in some ways, today’s passage seems to tie a pretty bow on the chapter, and it kind of does. But not without some more action involved—the work always continues, right?

You may recall that the earlier part of Matthew 10 invited the disciples (and us) to join in God’s mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God, which is full of various kinds of restorative work for mind, body, and spirit. It followed Jesus’ example as he showed the disciples what it looked like to go to various communities and bring true peace, where all is set right and brought to wholeness. The book of John describes this as “life to the full.”

And sometimes that proclamation of restoration may not be received with enthusiasm, but sometimes it will be! Either way, we proclaim it with peace as our posture, dusting our feet off when it isn’t received and going on our way. In doing so, we choose to embody and join the work of God.

Now, at the end of Matthew 10, after hearing about all the disciples of Christ may encounter (both good and...not so good), followers of Christ are being encouraged/reminded to give and receive hospitality. In just three verses the word “welcome” is said six times. That’s gotta mean something, right?

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That’s a lot of welcome!

HOSPITALITY

The term welcome, or hospitality, is a vital part of the good news of God. Wholeness and flourishing, restoration and liberation, must include the welcome and embrace of each person, as we embrace the image of God. I don't think any of us have likely experienced true welcome without also feeling embraced as ourselves.

Miroslav Volf, in his book called "Exclusion and Embrace" does some really meaningful writing on hospitality. He talks about how hospitality requires embrace, and how there are four structural elements in the movement of embrace. Think about when you go to give a hug.

He says, "These elements include "opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and opening them again."¹ He states that in order for true embrace to take place all four of these movements must be there and must take place in an "unbroken timeline."²

Volf shares that **open arms are a gesture** of desire for the other and an invitation for the other to enter. It portrays that "I do not want to be myself only; I want the other to be a part of who I am and I want to be a part of the other."³ Not only does one desire to be a part of the other, and the other a part of you, but you have also created space for the other person and have "made a movement out of myself so as to enter the space created by the other."⁴ **Waiting** is the second step of embrace. As you wait you display that this embrace is not "an act of invasion" but places the power of acceptance of the embrace in the hands (or arms) of the other.⁵ This act of waiting "is a sign that, although embrace may have a one-sidedness in its origin (the self makes the initial movement toward the other), it can never reach its goal without reciprocity (the other makes the movement toward the self)." ⁶ **Next, is closing the arms.** This part of the embrace cannot happen

¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 141.

² Volf, 141.

³ Volf, 141.

⁴ Ibid, 141.

⁵ Ibid, 142.

⁶ Ibid, 143.

without reciprocity. “It takes two pairs of arms for the *one* embrace....”⁷ Each person must enter the space of the other. **Finally, you open your arms again.** This movement signifies that while these two people have been held in mutual embrace they are also still diverse persons. “The end of an embrace is, in a sense, already a beginning of an embrace, even if that other embrace will take place only after both selves have gone about their own business for a while. Though embrace itself is not terminal, the movement of the self to the other and back has no end.”⁸ (Katelyn’s Theological Articulation Paper for her DMIN, 2021)

This posture of embrace does a beautiful job of helping us imagine and embody the work of hospitality, and reminds me of the beginning of Matthew 10 where it talks about extending peace wherever you go, offering it freely and allowing the other to receive it or not.

A former professor of mine, Richard Beck, talks about Volf’s work as a “will to embrace.”⁹ He states that “...the will to embrace must be the communal starting point. No discussion of hospitality or church discipline can commence until the will to embrace the dignity of the others is firmly in place.”¹⁰

This means that before anything else, we are called to embrace the other without judgement. This must be a posture of the church as it seeks to be a hospitable and welcoming place for all. This open posture is mirrored in the life of Christ, and even on the cross—it’s a sort of ever widening, opening of arms to God, self, others, and the world.

So here in Matthew 10, as we are again called to join in God’s mission, we do so by both receiving and extending hospitality. And it’s not just showing this welcome to those we encounter, but by doing so we show it to God’s own self. It’s sort of a foreshadowing to Matthew 25’s parable where Jesus said “just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

⁷ Ibid, 143.

⁸ Ibid, 145.

⁹ Richard Beck, *Unclean : Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2012), 139.

¹⁰ Beck, *Unclean*, 139.

“In the ancient world identity was tied to family and community. It was understood that in showing hospitality, one welcomed not just an individual, but implicitly, the community who sent the person and all that they represent. Therefore, welcoming a disciple of Jesus would mean receiving the very presence of Jesus himself and of the one who sent him, God the Father.” ([Working Preacher, Elisabeth Johnson](#))

This follows the Jewish law, “shaliach,” which is the concept that a man’s duly authorized messenger is to be seen “as the man himself.” (Interpretation Commentary)

One commentary states that as the disciples here “embody his [Jesus’s] mission, they enter into a kind of communion with him, just as Jesus lives and moves in communion with the One who sent him. In other words, Jesus’ being or presence or body — “the Body of Christ” — is constituted by his mission. If someone carrying out that embodied mission is welcomed, then Jesus is effectively welcomed as well, as is the One who sent him ([Matthew 10:40](#)). ([Salt Project](#)) — this is the received hospitality of the disciple, that we are then called to extend to others as well. And when we do so, it is an embodiment of the hospitality of God.

EXPERIENCE/SHARING

In light of this “welcome” we are going to “welcome” something a bit different as I wrap up today’s sermon. If welcome really is that important in the life and story of God, and I think it is, then it is also important that we understand what it means to be hospitable or to offer such a welcome. And we can’t fully understand that, without understanding how we and others experience welcome.

So, take a moment and call to mind when you have experienced true welcome or hospitality. What was a moment when you felt embraced? Or that you experienced hospitality as a gift from God? It could be recent or further back in time, but either way, think of that experience and why it stands out to you. What was that moment like? How did it make you feel?

Now, if you’re comfortable, and this is where the “something a bit different” really comes in, take a moment to share what that experience of hospitality was, or how it made you feel, to someone near you. For those joining us online, please comment with your answer, if you’re comfortable in doing so.

Okay, thank you for playing along :) I hope it helped you see a better glimpse of God's welcome to you and your neighbor, and the way we can extend it to others.

CONCLUSION

At the very end of this passage, it mentions receiving a reward. This reward is not something we receive having earned it by doing the "right things," but rather, is more like the word "inherit." "An inheritance is pure gift." (Working Preacher...) The work of hospitality is to welcome and care for others, which is also to receive or welcome Jesus and the One who sent him, and "to become heirs to all that the Father has to give."

[\(Working Preacher. Elisabeth Johnson\)](#)

And that "all the Father has to give" is the good news,
it is life to the full,

it is all being made whole and well. And we get to partner in that work, and it begins with welcome. **How incredible a gift, to be "mixed up in the mission of God" as we give, receive, and embody such welcome.**

May we go into this week showing hospitality as we continue to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near, continually partnering in the good work God is up to.
May it be so. Amen.