

HOSPITALITY  
28 June 2020  
Beaverkill Community Church  
Mary Hall

Matthew 10: 40-42

Genesis 22: 1-14

We are reading from the gospel of Matthew in this part of the Lectionary. We know that Matthew was a tax collector who not only collected taxes but also collected stories of Jesus. Unlike the other disciples, it is thought that Matthew could read, write and keep account of who paid taxes and who did not. He was an organizer who organized the gospel of Matthew into various sections, including the teachings of Jesus, or the Sermon on the Mount, the miracles of Jesus, and finally, Jesus' training of the disciples, which occurs in Chapter 10 which we just read from.

Jesus is telling what he expects of his disciples and in this passage from Matthew 10, he is telling them about the different aspects of welcome and hospitality. He is saying that if one receives others in his, Jesus', name, that is in love, charity and appreciation, it means that the same shall be returned. And so, when we welcome someone, we expect that the object of our welcome will respond to us with love, charity and appreciation.

Welcome seems such a simple word - it is one of the first words that we learn when we study a foreign language. In seven northern European languages, the word sounds very similar.

Listen:

In Norwegian it is *Velkommen*

In Danish, *Velkommen*

In Swedish *Valkommen*

In German, *Wilkommen*

In Iceland, *Valkomen*

In Scotland, *Walkomin*

In Holland, *Welcom*

In many other languages, of course, the sound is quite different:

In France, *Bienvenue*

In Spain, *Bienvidos*

In Arabic, *Marhaben*

In Cantonese, *Foon ying*

In Hawaiian, *Aloha mai*

Hebrew, *Baruch haba*

Japanese, *Yo koso*

Zulu, *Emukela*

Many of us have welcome mats outside of our front doors. Have you ever had a welcome mat at your house? Often, our welcome mats simply say, **WELCOME**. Sometimes, we have welcome signs hanging outside the front door of our house. Sometimes we have a welcome plaque hanging in our entry hallway. We want to communicate to those who are entering that they are welcomed.

The word welcome is associated with a special guest - perhaps someone who has never visited before, perhaps someone from far away. We don't use that word to our spouse when they come

in from fixing the car or grocery shopping. We use it for a special occasion.

What does it mean to welcome someone? It means that you are happy, delighted, pleased to see them. You have a smile on your face (or in your eyes if you are wearing a mask). You extend your hand or your arms and a few months ago we would have shaken hands or hugged. If we are the ones to be welcomed, we know that we are wanted and appreciated by the way that we are greeted.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, you will remember that the notion of welcome and hospitality is of critical importance. In Greek, the word "xenos" means both stranger and host and is the root of the word xenophobia, which we know means "hatred of foreigners (or strangers)". Odysseus is mostly the stranger in the *Odyssey*, and he receives a great deal of hospitality on his journeys, though he is also sometimes regarded as the enemy stranger. In his homeland, the suitors are welcomed as guests by Penelope and her household, but they abuse this welcome. They do not respond with love and appreciation but rather attempt to take advantage of those around them. As we know, they eventually reap their rewards for this behavior. Thus, welcome can be a two-way journey. Yet travelers throughout history would never have been able to make their journeys without depending upon welcome in foreign lands, or, in the words of Tennessee Williams' character, Blanche DuBois, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Again, throughout history, and very likely continuing onward, what we have learned and achieved is very often from strangers,

for how else can we expand ourselves? How else can we become larger souls than what we are without extending ourselves to others?

When I was a little girl, I had a friend in school who invited me back to her house after classes one day. I knew that her parents were Persian and I was interested to meet them and know what that was about. But when I got there, I found that these very friendly and gracious people spoke with an accent that made it hard for me to understand their words and that they offered me food that seemed very peculiar. I was afraid and needed my home. I remember that I told them that I had to listen to my favorite soap opera on the radio and so I had to go back to my house. I practically ran home. But ever afterwards I remembered this for how foolish and stupid I had been, for how nice these people had been to me, for how my actions must have saddened them, and for how I had lost this opportunity to know something outside my everyday life. Obviously, my regret was powerful for I'm remembering it now to tell you all these years later. I do think that our natural inclination is to be more friendly with our customary acquaintances and, though perhaps not behave as I did, by running home, be a bit more formal or turn away from those who are strange to us.

But Jesus is telling us that hospitality and the reciprocity from hospitality is the building block of the good life, the life that will lead to God and God's love. He is saying that to give even a cup of cold water to a needy and thirsty person is to become a person of God, one of God's blessed ones. And what does that mean? It means we give this water, this welcome, this attempt at understanding and appreciating the stranger, we give this from

our heart, from our being, from our belief (?) that this is how the world must work. We all must be disciples in the sense of taking this teaching and being ambassadors for it. We say “welcome” in any of the languages that are available to us and we thus become a part of the universe of goodwill. I heard a song played on the radio the other days, the chorus of which seemed to fit right into this message. It goes, “I had no place to go/ You opened up your door/ And you made me a palate/ on the floor.” And that, like the cold water, is about understanding need and responding to it in the ways that we are able.

But this notion of the two-way journey of welcome is not just about helping those in need. It is also about what we receive by extending ourselves to others. Our participation in the world is broadened, our knowledge and capacity are expanded, and thus our ability to respond to a wider range of situations grows.

If I had only, as a child, had an inkling of this notion, I could have been friends with a family who was Persian, learned about their experience, their food, maybe even a bit of their language. Instead I went home and listened to “Our Gal Sunday” on the radio. Sigh...

But here is the thing, my friends... we always have another chance... another chance to take in these teachings of Jesus and be a welcomer, a welcomer in any language that suits.

*Velkommen, Walkomin, Bienvenue*

Let us pray:

Teach us be mindful, Lord, of the multitudes of ways to welcome and the beautiful life that then opens.