

Welcome has the Final Word
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Welcome has the final word in today's two scripture readings.

The Psalm spends the majority of its brief verses recounting the trials and tribulations of the author — the realities of a hostile and inhospitable environment. But its final verse testifies to the promise and assurance in the abundant life of God:

*I trust in your love; my heart rejoices in the deliverance you bring. I'll sing to you,
[God], for being so good to me*

The verses from the gospel attributed to Matthew come from the end of the tenth chapter which is dedicated to recounting Jesus' instructions to the Twelve Disciples as he sends them to preach, teach, heal, and organize the Jewish villages in the Galileean countryside.

Sensing the disciples' anxiety and fear of failure and rejection — Jesus spends a good portion of Chapter 10 enumerating all the ways the disciples could be encountering hostility.

LIST

But at the very end of the discourse, Jesus holds out the promise and hope of hospitality:

“Those who welcome you also welcome me, and those who welcome me welcome the One who sent me.

Those who welcome prophets just because they are prophets will receive the reward reserved for the prophets themselves; those who welcome holy people just because they are holy will receive the reward of the holy ones.

“The truth is, whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones just for being a disciple will not lack a reward”

I think the Disciples would have heard their own stories in these closing words.

They were invited and welcomed by Jesus to join his movement from various walks of life — fishing, tax collector, revolutionary. Jesus called people who had experienced failure, exclusion and ostracism, who were restless idealists, and longed for freedom. Through that welcome they experienced God's welcome as their lives were healed, changed, and found new meaning. Jesus was preparing them for a new vocation, a new adventure as prophets.

He even gave them nicknames:

Simon was Petros, the Rock. Mary was Magdala, the Tower. Thomas, didymis the Twin. The brothers James and John, the Sons of Thunder. Levi, the tax collector, Matthew the gift of God. Each a reminder for when they didn't feel strong, towering, thundering, or gifted.

Jesus deeply connects the invitation and welcome they were offered and accepted to the hospitality they will offer and receive in the name of Jesus — as a continuation and extension of Jesus' movement.

Jesus is not expecting great actions. He lifts up the simple but profound act of offering a cup of cold water. In this record setting worldwide heatwave, we can understand how this can be an urgent, act of life saving hospitality in the midst of climate hostility.

Welcome as the final word.

Now words like welcome and hospitality can sometimes sound as sentimentality. But there is something deeper at work here.

My favorite professor in seminary, Amy Oden.

At the time I was student Dr. Oden was interested in Christian practices of hospitality. She wrote a slim volume entitled, God's Welcome.

In it she defined God's Welcome or gospel hospitality as "God's welcome into abundant life, God's own life" AND. outlined four marks of "gospel hospitality."

Readiness, Risk, Recognition, Repentance.

Readiness — one must be ready to offer hospitality; to deliver on the promises made by the welcome and the invitation. There is nothing more detrimental to a welcome than failing to follow through. Readiness is being realistic about our capacities and competencies; knowing the limits of our hospitality and the scope of our welcome. It is also a commitment to growing in our readiness.

Risk — hospitality can be a dangerous and disruptive undertaking for both the host and the guest. When we offer hospitality we risk rejection. What if people don't show up for us. We risk failure. What if people don't like us or worse what if we do harm or are harmed? We risk change. New people bring new ideas, perspective, ways of doing things. They bring change.

Repentance — one does not remain the same encountering the other and feeling truly welcomed.

Repentance here does not mean feeling bad or sorry or regretful (although those feelings may be present).

It is metanoia in the Greek. A word which means a “turning about” ; a complete 180; a radical change.

Recognition — When we first meet and experience people we don't know their triumph and tragedies, the choices they've made, the pain they have cause and experienced, the sacrifices they've made, the good they've done. And they don't know ours. Recognition is the longing to be seen for our deepest, truest selves. To be known. To be loved. To belong. The longing to see others for their deepest, truest selves. To know another. To love another. To belong together. Everyone has a deeper..

Readiness, Risk, Repentance, Recognition

Which one of these marks speaks to you most this morning?

Last week, I said I hope our time together would be marked by the rhythm of rest of renewal. I also hope it will be marked by gospel hospitality. I hope welcome always has the final word at Central.

I have certainly experienced Central's hospitality first hand. I am deeply grateful for the warm and gracious welcome I've received from all of you.

I've heard first hand from many of you about how Central surrounded you with love and care during a difficult moment, our welcomed your doubt as you deconstructed and reconstructed your faith, or offered a space to find meaning and make a difference, or became a chosen family when needed most.

Central, across the years, opened its doors to those escaping slavery, migrant and refugees from China and , to Union orgnaizers and striking workers, and myriad of grass roots justice seeking organizations and movements. Currently it welcomes people experiencing homelessness throguh the NOAH project, communiy artist through Swords into Plowshares Art Gallery, and people organizing to end poverty and make the social assistance programs work for the people through MWRO, UTCC, and Westside Mothers.

This is a place where God's welcome and gospel hospitality is at work! Where it has been embodied, experienced, and shared across the decades and generations.

As I continue to listen and learn about Central, I see God's Welcome; gospel hospitality manifesting is several ways.

I've had a chance to get to know many of our UM churches across Michigan over the past 10 years. Central is one of the most diverse churches in terms of race, age, gender indentity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class. In addition, Central has long been home to radical, abolitionist analysis and activism. Detroit, Michigan United Methodism, needs the witness of a church like Central. How can we lean even deeper into this identity? How can we extend a warm welcome and truly include the next generation of Detroiters who shared these

value or are searching for a more excellent way to experience and express their faith, or are longing for meaning, belonging, love and care.

At the heart of our building redevelopment project is providing some 60 units of permanent supportive housing in the Church House Building and a new Building in our parking lot — to provide a home and a circle of care and support for people who are unhoused. In short, we will have a neighborhood in our parking lot!

In a part of the city that is increasingly inhospitable and hostile to people experiencing homelessness — that is gentrifying and becoming a playground for the wealthy — Central is taking a stand and making a home for the most vulnerable Detroiters. This will challenge us to embody radical, gospel hospitality from our parking lot to our roof top garden.

How will we be ready to welcome our new neighbors into this space? What will we need to risk? How will we need to change and make a complete 180 in how we do things? Will we have the courage to be a church and community where we are truly siblings, kin?

Is this not the gospel hospitality work God has been preparing Central for? Are we ready for it?

It will have its risks

Because we are a diverse community,

We will make mistakes with each other, our partners, and neighbors. We will challenge and learn from each other.

There will definitely be moments of failure, disappointment, and rejection.

We will most certainly encounter challenges and resistance from business, city, and other neighbors

As we seek to offer We will be mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and materially unsettled

We will have to change, see things from new perspectives,

At times it will be a steep learning curve

We will have to be creative, adaptive

All while being Steadfast and unwavering in our core values.

Will we have the final word here at Central?

God I hope so.

I hope that we will recognize ourselves, our current partners, people we have not met yet not as strangers, but kind and generous friends.

I am convicted God is gently, subtly, lovingly preparing and drawing people to this place just I am convicted God is reading us seek and receive these new neighbors and future friends and coconspirators for love and justice.

Central has a nickname ... Conscience of the City.

To that, might Jesus be also calling us to add a few more nicknames ...Central - The Church
Downtown for Good... and Central - A Home For All

God I hope so.

May it be so. Amen.

Southern Boarder story — Shalom and baby at La Posada Providencia

Shalom's story, in that moment, ended in hospitality had the final word.

My first response was a skepticism — I thought of all the other people who attempted the
perilous journey and did not survive — whose stories ended in hostility, those for whom life
proved to be inhospitable.

THANK YOU

Thankful all so much for the warm and gracious welcome since it was announced I was coming
to Central 6 months ago!

PRAYER

SERMON

In many languages influenced by Latin the word for hostility and hospitality come from the same
root word, hostis

In Greek, xenos, the root for both xenophobia and xenophilia.

The Irish philosopher Richard Kearney says there are two basic ethical choices in life —
Hostility or hospitality.

Kearney's assertion is informed by his Catholic faith, postmodern, continental philosophical
training (for you academics out there think Ricoeur, Levinas, and Derrida), and his peace
building work with youth and young adults during and after the Irish troubles (for your streamers
out there think Netflix's Derry Girls).

This morning's readings from the Psalms and the Gospel traditionally attributed to Matthew resonate with Kearney's insight.

Likewise, our reading from Matthew are the final Verses of a long chapter in which Jesus offers words of warning as he sends out his disciples to the Galilean villages. The author of Matthew's gospel has Jesus spend ????? Verses outlining the following possible hostile response to their work of preaching, Teaching, healing, and exorcising LIST.

Both Psalm and Matthew Chapter 10, end with a word of hope and assurance

Lots of Hostility and just a little bit of hospitality.

This is what I love about the Bible — at its best it captures the reality of life, life's ups and downs, laments and celebrations, uncertainties and paradoxes.

Psalm and Matt acknowledge both ... in fact they give the greater part to hostility, ending with a brief word on the promise of hospitality

Hostile to life
Poverty
Violence
Dehumanization - criminalization
Climate Change

The summer between my senior year of high school and my first year of college, I went for a long run around sun set.

I need to blow of some steam. I needed to think about my future. I needed to work off all the excitement and stress that was building up in my body as I prepared for the next chapter in my life.

By the time I closed in on the final mile of my run, the sun had set, the sky was dark and the moon shoon.

Without knowing it, I found myself suddenly stopped in my tracks, staring up at the sky.

In the midst of my uncertainty about “what I was going to be when I grow up” about whether I was ready to move away from home ...

I can't truly explain what I saw or experienced in that moment that felt like it stretched out over a lifetime. It was like the moments of my life unfolded all at once before me.

I felt God's reassuring presense and knew deep in my heart that everything was going to be ok, if I just tried, as best as I could, to just take the next faithful step.

And so this morning I find myself taking the next faithful step my vocational journey as a United Methodist minister, a Deacon.

For the past decade I've worked as a church bureaucrat for our Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church focusing on mission, justice and young adult ministries for the first eight years and administration the last two years.

Moving to Central is a big change for me. Moving from being an occasional preacher to being a weekly preacher. Readjusting to the rhythms and schedules of congregational life.

Further, as a Deacon, being appointed to a pastoral role, is an irregular appointment — it is a departure for how things are usually done in the United Methodist Church.

And yet, there is something that feels so right about being appointed here at Central.

I've served for almost 8 years in Central CDCs board of directors, chairing our Building Committee for the past four.

The Scripture readings this morning speak about God's reassuring presence in the midst of uncertainty.

I want to focus on the reading from Matthew.

We heard this morning the final verses of Chapter 10, which is itself on long speech from Jesus to his disciples as he sends them out to the Galileean to extend his preaching and healing ministry.

Is there a time in your life when you felt really welcome? When you received a truly gracious invitation ... when someone opened up their home or their lives and included you when you most needed it? To grieve or to heal or to rest.

Or welcomed you back when you made a mistake?

Or created a space for you to be your unique, weird self ... to celebrate and party down when life is at its most zesty?

Do you have the memory in your mind — ok hold onto and savor it for a moment.

For those of you who are struggling for such a memory.

It's ok. Not all of us have had positive experience of welcome and hospitality. Maybe

Jesus - invitation and rejection

In Greek “host” and “guest” are the same word

Welcome Jesus

Mystical (encounter and participation) and prophetic (ethical responsibility, accountability, and action) dimensions

Jesus messes us up, keeps inviting, gracious welcome at every start,

Thankful for the warm and gracious welcome

How I am hearing Jesus invitation as I begin at Central

Central as multi-racial, multi-cultural, and LBGTQIA inclusive

Central's redevelopment — downtown for good, welcoming a neighborhood of people who experienced homelessness, being unhoused

Central's legacy partners — NOAH, MWRO, UTCC, West Side Mothers, Swords into Plowshares, Peace Gallery Sanctuary Housing

Invitation to dream about how the doors of the church might once again be thrown open to the community, how we might build relationship with new neighbors and incubate new ministries and new partnerships in the years ahead.

We are going to need Jesus

Make mistakes with each other ... challenge and learn from each other

Encounter challenges and resistance from business, city, and other neighbors

Unsettled, change, move

Learn and be creative, adaptive

Steadfast and unwavering in our core values

