

Pentecost 4 – Year A – June 28, 2020
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Fairview Village
 Text: Matthew 10: 40-42
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Jesus says, the one who welcomes him welcomes the one who sent him. Our welcome to others is a way of welcoming God.

In my opinion, the people of Trinity have one of the best welcomes for a church community. Your spirit of hospitality invites those who are visiting into the community. You show general interest in people who are new. It is as if you open the doors and say, “Come and see. Here’s what we have together. It is also for you.” It is a remarkable way of being community. Welcoming the new one in our midst. Welcoming Jesus through that person.

Part of the welcome that Jesus describes is the ability to see God in each other. If you’ve ever taken a yoga class, you begin and end with a simple bow, hands over heart, with the greeting “Namaste.” My yoga teacher expressed that there are many translations, but the one she gives is “The divine in you bows to the divine in me.” Welcoming God by seeing holiness in the other.

One day, I was driving on 95 right before the Girard Point Bridge. With multiple lanes of traffic, a person was weaving in and out of the lanes at a rate of speed that was at least 85 miles per hour. Beeping and honking at everyone to get out of his way. Some friendly Philadelphian hand gestures also accompanied his road rage. As he passed me, I laughed at the enormous bumper sticker on his car. Can you guess? NAMASTE

There are times that we wear the bumper sticker of welcome, but we don’t really see Jesus in another person. We can’t really tell people how welcoming we are. They need to tell us.

Sadly, our world is not always welcoming.

Before we get too proud of our Trinity welcome, we must do the hard work of seeing where we do not welcome others. As human beings, we gravitate towards those who are like us. They get the easy welcome, the best example of welcoming Jesus in our midst.

But what about those who are unlike us? I only need to go to social media to give current examples of what I mean. On Facebook, where you “friend” each other, I have seen people be downright cruel to each other. I have heard those who disagree politically with another demanding that people “unfriend” them if they are not willing to believe the same thing. There is not much room for namaste in the world of ultimatums. When we are so angry with each other, are we blind to the part of God that lives in the other person?

Historically, we see the welcome of God from the Native Americans. Teaching survival techniques to those who made it through their first winter, only about half as many as made the journey. Breaking bread together. Lots of bread, because our native brothers and sisters never let you leave hungry. In a letter by English colonist Edward Winslow, the three day feast of the first Thanksgiving was described as a way to “rejoice together, after we gathered the fruits of our labors” of the harvest.

That sounds like welcoming Jesus. Yet the early pilgrims saw their native counterparts as heathens. Because there was difference. Difference in belief, difference in cultural norms. The same people who helped them through the first horrible winter would pay dearly for their kindness. The colonists stole their land. Linger names we know - Conshohocken, Schuylkill, Shamokin, Wissahickon, Allegheny, Catasauqua, Manayunk, Passyunk, Punxsutawney, Pocono, Susquehanna – these names give clues to the people who once claimed the land as home where we now reside. The southeastern part of our state was home to the Susquehannock and Lenape Delaware tribes.

The early pilgrims did not see the holy in our Native brothers and sisters. After working with Lakota people for many years, I know how very spiritual they are. I see the holy in them, and pray they see the holy in me. I am often amazed at their ability to work side by side with those whose ancestors ravaged their lands and people. Perhaps it is the same divine spirit that welcomed the first pilgrims that remains with our Lakota brothers and sisters.

Jesus says whoever welcomes you welcomes me. We receive welcome from our Native American neighbors. Have we seen God in them? Have we worked towards righting the unwelcome of our ancestors? Who do we not welcome in our neighborhoods?

Are we building literal or figurative walls to keep people out? Or to lock ourselves in? Either way, we are cutting off the ability to see God face to face in another. We are trying to shape God to be just like us. But the reality is that God's welcome comes to us through people who are very different than you and me. God's welcome, God's love invites us to join the hungry one at the soup kitchen. Not just to feed that person for a day, but to be fed by that person in relationship. God lives and abides in that person, and reveals a piece of God to us that we need to know.

God's welcome lives in the protestor of Black Lives Matter and in the protestor who wants individual rights restored in Pennsylvania. God's welcome lives in those who believe things we do not believe politically. Can you even imagine that? How do we keep ourselves at the table of conversation without storming off and writing off the person who differs from us?

Jesus says, whoever welcomes you welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. We are welcomed into God's most bountiful and gracious hospitality. We are welcome to everything God has and is. We are welcome in God's world, and God makes sure we know it. God claims us in a promise and in water at baptism, and we become forever part of God's heart and story. We are not only invited to be part of God's life, but we are encouraged to bring a friend or two with us.

This is the hospitality we see in today's Gospel. And it is the life we are called into as Christians. To love God so entirely, we greet each other in the name and with that kind of love.

It is not easy at all to welcome in this way, when we consider what we have to give up to do so. We give up our earthly pride and our stubborn ways, so that we might welcome the stranger. So that we might welcome the one we see as enemy. Picture the person you disagree with the most. Can you put aside your differences long enough to see that person as a beloved child of God?

There is so much at stake today in our relationships. And Jesus knows this. We can't put any relationship above God, that's what today's Gospel is saying. But when we see the divine One in the other person, we begin to reveal God to each other in a new way.

Today, we are invited to offer the cup of cold water, the cup of welcome to Jesus. Perhaps that will come to you in unexpected ways. Perhaps you will offer it to the one you disagree with so strongly. Perhaps you will offer it to yourself, as a way of accepting that Jesus comes first.

Somewhere, Jesus is waiting to receive you and me in this way. With a holy welcome, a humbling Namaste, a chance to find God right before our very eyes.

May God's welcome find you and keep you always. +