

# THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from  
Region 6



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## Lectionary 13, Year A

*Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, Northwestern Ohio Synod*

Gospel Text - Matthew 10:24-39

### **Matthew 10:40-42**

[Jesus said to the twelve:] <sup>40</sup> "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> 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, <sup>42</sup> 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."

## SERMON TEXT:

Welcome. Welcome is our word of the day. And welcome is the word that Jesus shares with us this day. So welcome. It is such a simple word. And welcome is often 1 of the 1st words we learn when we study a foreign language. So, I googled "welcome" and found a website with 325 languages and 325 different ways to say, "welcome."

Now I learned that in 5 languages, the word "welcome" sounds almost identical, with just slight shades of difference. In Norwegian, the word is Velkommen. In Danish, Velkommen. In German, Willkommen. In Icelandic, Velkomen. In Dutch, Welcom.

But when you listen to the word, "welcome" in the other languages, you hear other sounds. In French, Bienvenue. In Spanish, Bienvidos. In Arabic, Marhaben. In Chinese, Foon ying. In Hebrew, Baruch haba. And in Japanese, Yo kosa. On the internet, I found 325 ways to say it. But what I couldn't find is 325 ways to do it. And there lies the conundrum, for saying the "welcome" isn't nearly as important as doing the welcome.

Today, Jesus focuses on the doing rather than the saying. Jesus says to His followers, **"Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes the 1 who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward. And whoever welcomes a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous."**

Now Jesus is well acquainted with the norms of hospitality that continue to be play such an important role of Middle Eastern

culture. To welcome the stranger. And to extend hospitality are no casual matters; these are matters of God. For in a profound way, the gift of welcome is the gift of God.

For God's love is wide open. No boundaries and no barriers. And the sacred stories of Scripture reflect a loving and a welcoming God. God feeds His people and quenches their thirst as they journey from slavery into the Promised Land. God invites His people to the banquet table of grace and forgiveness. God welcomes the stranger and the sojourner and commands that we go and do likewise.

And Jesus models his life and shapes his ministry out of this same Godly character. And it gets him into all kinds of trouble. Welcoming the stranger and the outcast. Eating with tax collectors and sinners. Boldly and unabashedly proclaiming that God's love is for each and for every. Jesus' life is the epitome of welcome and hospitality. He believes it. He lives it. He dies for it and He rises again with the promise that 1 day you will be welcomed into God's outstretched and welcoming arms.

And this "Way of Jesus" becomes the call for all of us who follow the crucified and risen one. The call to welcome the outcast. To welcome the stranger. To show compassion to the needy. And to help the hungry and the thirsty. This is his consistent command, and the early Church takes this commandment to heart. And what a community of welcome it was. Just read the opening chapters of the Book of Acts.

And welcome continues to be a central part of whose we are, who we are, and what we are called to do. Welcome. Invitation.

Hospitality. This is the way of love. And this is the way of Jesus. And this is the way of those who faithfully follow.

As a people of God gathered together in this parish, at this time, and in this place, we are called by Jesus to hold sacred the greeting, the hospitality, and the welcome for each and for every. For as it says in the Book of Hebrews, "**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angel's w/o knowing it.**"

You see, in the extension of the welcome, and in the failure to do so, there is great power. There is the power to build up. And there is the power to tear down. Lutheran Pastor and Storyteller Extraordinaire Walter Wangerin, Jr., God rest his soul, once wrote a powerful story called **Edification or Demolition?**

Once upon a time, he writes. There were 2 gas station attendants. One I met right at the pump. The other at the counter. The 1st on a rainy evening. The 2nd in the middle of the afternoon... though there was no sunshine in that building.

What caused the difference; I do not pretend to know. And there may be a host of reasons why the 2nd was so bitter and the 1st so sweet. But that isn't the point right now. The point is the welcome and the failure thereof. The point is the power to build up the other, or the power to tear them down. For you see, no matter how trite the circumstance, nor how quick the meeting. There is power in the simplest greeting and the warmest welcome, and it is a mighty power indeed.

I remember that I had my back against the rain. I hunched at the rear of the car. I had screwed the cap off and was running gasoline into the tank. Suddenly, right beside me stood the attendant. His hands in his pockets. He said, "**Hello. Thank you for stopping at our station.**" and a smile flashed across his face. When he spoke, he looked directly into my eyes, w/o fear, w/o embarrassment, with neither judgment, nor haughtiness, nor threat.

He was lean. Dark hair streaked across his forehead with the falling rain. He nodded and smiled as he saw the face of my little child looking out the window. I think he even laughed.

The fill-up seemed to take a long time. Then I hit close to 20 bucks and ran it slowly to the double zeros. Replaced the nozzle. Tightened the cap. I handed him the bill and watched while he folded it into his roll.

Now he did not solve some great problem of mine. Nor did he save me from despair, or point out something that I hadn't noticed. Nevertheless, this attendant did the extraordinary. He shook my hand. He smiled, and he said, "**Thank you.**" To which I replied, "**You're welcome**". When actually, it was this young gas station attendant, who gave the real welcome.

And I admit it. This is a trite and nearly forgettable experience. Almost unworthy of pulpit pondering. Except when I slid back into the car, I stopped a moment before turning the key, and my wife asked, "**Why are you smiling?**" I was smiling because this attendant had built me up. He handed me a cool cup of water. He

welcomed me. I never saw him again, but truly I tell you, that young man will not lose his reward.

And neither did I ever see the other attendant again. But I remember her also. She kept a separated seat, while I filled my thirsty car. Which really isn't the issue. Most attendants don't pop out of the station for every guy that handles the hose. Although, some of you might remember when they used to. But when I entered the building, she kept her seat and she kept her eye downward, gazing at the top of the counter. There was no magazine or book there. She was not reading. She was simply staring. I held out the bill.

**"What do you want me to do with that?"** she demanded. **"Well, you might want to take it,"** I said. **"I'm paying for the gas."** **"How much was it?"** she asked. **"\$20.00,"** I said.

There were lines from her nose to the corners of her mouth. Deep and sullen lines. Angry lines. And I was, for whatever reason, an intrusion in her life. She snapped the bill from my fingers and slammed it into the register. I remember that she was chewing gum. It popped like the tail of an angry rattler.

I stood there, too long I think. She said, w/o even looking up, **"Your car broke down? You waiting for something?"** **"No,"** I said. **"I guess not."** I slid disquieted into the car and just sat for a moment. Sat amidst demolition and destruction. Her unkindness, her lack of welcome, and her sad spirit. 3 expressions of 1 great pain. That was a day that was just torn down. For there was no cool cup of water. And there was no welcome.

And you ask, **“But how can I serve the Lord? I’m not important. What I do is so common and of such little consequence. Anyone can do what I do.”**

But I say to you, “Every time you meet another human being. You have an opportunity to pursue holiness. For at that moment, you will do 1 of 2 things. Either you will build up or you will tear down. Either you will acknowledge that he is, or you will make him sorry that he is. Sorry that he is there, in front of you. You will welcome her or you will send her away empty-handed. You will build her up or you will break her down. And these things that we dignify or deny, these are God’s own things. For all of us, each and every one of us, is made in God’s own image.

And so, I say to you, “There are no minor meetings. There are no dead-end jobs. There are no pointless lives. You are a child of God, and you are loved and you are cherished”.

Dear friends in Christ, swallow your sorrows. Pack away your grievances. And all the hurt you have received or given. Turn your face to the one with whom you are at odds. The one in your home. The one at work. The one at school. The one with whom you worship. Turn your face to that one and offer your hand and open your heart. And it will make all the difference.

For when we extend a genuine welcome and when we practice true hospitality, the result is always real and quite dramatic. Walls are torn down. Fear and distrust are abolished. Pettiness and pain are cast aside. And that which was broken, is “bit-by-bit”, pieced back together. Until we all are whole.

This morning Jesus welcomes us as we welcome others. And this morning, Jesus invites us to be and do, exactly who God is and what God does. Grace filled and loving. Hospitable and kind. Inviting and welcoming. So, Willkommen. Willkommen. Baruch haba. Bienvidos. Bienvenue. Welcome. Over 325 ways for us to say it, and just as many ways for us to go out into the world and do it.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

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