

Generosity of Spirit
Matthew 25:31-40
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
September 7, 2025
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As we have heard, today is Welcome Sunday. And I wonder if we really think about what that means. After all, “Welcome Sunday” can just be heard as the title of an event. But, what if today is Welcome Sunday, not because we needed something to call it, but as a reminder of one of our core values? What if today is Welcome Sunday, not only because it is something that people like us think is important, but because we believe that welcome is at the heart of who our generous, compassionate God is and who God asks *us* to be? What if Welcome Sunday is more than an event, more than a day? What if it is a reminder of who we are at our core?

So, let’s talk about welcome for a few minutes.

What is welcome?

As you all know, often I find myself going to the dictionary, especially when thinking about words that we use pretty commonly. When I looked up the word “welcome” I was interested to see that welcome is listed as a verb, as an exclamation, as a noun, and as an adjective. Now *that* is a versatile word. So it is what we do as a greeting, it is how we do it, it is something we say, it is a feeling we hope to offer. It is all of this and more.

Let me ask another question. How do we practice welcome?

Perhaps it matters where we are, right?

At home we might greet someone at the door with a smile and usher them inside. We might offer a hug or prepare a snack. We might even let them sit in our favorite chair.

At school, as has happened in recent weeks, we set up classrooms, put names on cubbies and desks, and give tours to people who are new to the buildings.

At church we have many practices that are about welcome. Each week some of you serve as ushers and greeters, functioning as the first smiling faces that people see. And each week there is one of those people at the front door ready to park the cars of those for whom the walk from the parking lot is a little too long. In worship we review logistics so that you don’t have to be here every week to know where to find the offering box or how we do communion. We offer a space where kids can comfortably worship even with their wiggles and a nursery for the littlest among us when that’s the

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space that serves them best. We work to support various needs with large print copies of the sermons and communion served where people sit. We are currently having conversations about interior signage recognizing that is one of the places where we can improve our welcome. And *always* we offer the reminder that everyone is welcome at the communion table.

All of these things are important and helpful. *And* they are not the fullness of welcome.

Because we all know that welcome is more than a set of well thought out actions. We have inevitably all been to places where there are people going through the right motions, but seemingly unengaged in them - a distracted, disinterested server who dutifully repeats all the specials, quickly brings us our food, willingly answers our questions, but who still seems like they'd rather be anywhere else with anyone else; a teacher whose classroom looks like it came out of a education catalog but who seems cold or awkward around the children; a church where doors are promptly opened and help is offered in finding a seat, where signage clearly identifies the restroom, but where we leave wondering if anyone even noticed we were there.

We can go through the motions of welcome. *Or* we can root ourselves in a commitment to it, so that we offer welcome from a place of generosity, a place where we are curious and where we are open to new possibilities, a place where we invite people not only into shared space, but into shared lives.

And we get some clues for what that looks like in our scripture today.

Jesus, speaking to his disciples in the last days of his life says, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25:35-36, NRSV).

See true welcome...true hospitality...they begin deep down inside us with a generosity of spirit. They begin in the place where we are willing to pay attention to others, to give things up for others, to risk ourselves for others, to value our neighbor as much as we value ourselves. And when we live from these values, then they also push us out into the world, away from our churches and homes and neighborhoods, to meet people where they are.

John Wesley, in a sermon titled, “On Visiting the Sick”, wrote, “One great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor, is, because they seldom visit them. Hence it is, that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers” ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)).

The call of welcome in our lives isn't only a call to make ready the spaces we already inhabit. While that serves a great purpose for those who come into our spheres. The call of welcome pushes us further, pushes us beyond the confines of our familiar places and out into the world to carry that same care with us.

After all, if we would bake a cake for friends who already have enough, why wouldn't we feed those who are hungry?

If we would offer a cold cup of water to a co-worker coming in from the heat, why wouldn't we hand water to an unhoused person on a summer day?

If we would sit at a table with someone new today as we gather for lunch downstairs after worship, why wouldn't we also sit with a stranger at the Free Lunch Program or in the park or at the mall's food court and allow curiosity to lead us toward relationship?

Hospitality is another word we use...it's a synonym for welcome. And it has something to teach us. See, in Greek hospitality is a compound word: philoxenia. Philo being one of the Greek words for love, xenia being the word for stranger. And if we think of it we know that root - xenia - we have heard it most commonly in the word xenophobia, the fear or hatred of strangers.

But hospitality, the welcome of God's heart, is philoxenia - the love of strangers. And we only get there when we really see people, when we really listen to people, when we are willing to open up our lives and willing to meet them in the midst of theirs.

So, today - on Welcome Sunday - we renew our commitment to welcome, to hospitality, to loving from God's heart. We start here with each other. And, it is an important place to start...for we, too, value the welcome and the hospitality, the love that is shown in small and large acts of care.

But Welcome Sunday doesn't end after we have eaten lunch and played some games. No, we are called to allow the generosity of God's spirit to inhabit us and to carry us out into the world because when we do, then in all the people we meet, we will see not strangers but friends and in all the needs we encounter, we will respond by wondering how we can help.

This is the life to which we are called. Not a series of actions dutifully done, but a generosity of spirit that shapes us to live from a place of hospitality, of compassion, of love. May it be so.