

Legacy of Welcome
Sermon Preached June 27 & 28, 2026
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
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This week's Gospel is a continuation of the verses we heard last Sunday - and in a way that works, because my mind keeps going to a moment we shared last Sunday.

But first, the Gospel. In our text, Jesus continues his address to the disciples. Remember he's just told him that he's sending them out without gold or money, or a bag, or a change of clothes, not even a staff or sandals. They are meant to be completely dependent - both on God and on the communities which receive them. In essence - Jesus tells them that the success of their mission hinges on their vulnerability and dependence.

This week he goes further - describing their welcome in the communities to which they are sent. In these few verses we hear three designations, if you will - prophets, the righteous, and the little ones. Jesus isn't necessarily describing three separate types of people, but three aspects of discipleship.

The prophetic has to do with proclaiming the Good News - no matter the consequences. Righteousness entails pursuing justice and healing broken relationships - again, no matter the cost. And lastly, the little ones - whose vulnerability embodies being fully dependent upon God's power and presence.¹

Admittedly, dependence and risk for the sake of others - are contrary to American cultural values. We like to think of ourselves as self-made, independent, personally powerful, and self-determining. Yet, Jesus is clear - dependence upon God is essential to discipleship. It's the foundation of the alternative community he is creating. Dependence on God, and upon one another anchor God's kingdom here on earth.

Additionally, in our text, Jesus highlights how vital welcoming is. He's not addressing hospitality in general. Here, he's being specific. Welcoming the prophet as a prophet - and thus, what the prophet has to say, even when that may include uncomfortable truths. Welcoming the righteous, those who strive for justice - even when that work upends the status quo, and disturbs peace built on injustice. And a welcoming that costs something - water, food, shelter, given to those who are vulnerable, "in the name of a disciple."

When, as we follow Jesus, we welcome the prophetic truth, uphold uncomfortable justice, and provide for the most vulnerable - an interesting thing happens. We become connected to those we welcome. And we become a faithful, interdependent community of integrity and love, willing to risk for truth and justice. We become part of the kingdom of God - providing opportunities for God's mission to flourish in our own time and place. A community in which God's way is proclaimed, God's justice is discerned and acted upon, and the love of God is extended to all the vulnerable.

In last Sunday's sermon, we celebrated Pride and Juneteenth, and acknowledged our need to continue to proclaim God's truth, fight for justice, and protect and care for the most vulnerable - and all of God's children. After the sermon, you clapped. Which was stunning to me. I tried to explain to you then - that you make it all possible. I'm not sure I articulated it clearly, because you caught me off guard.

So let me be clear now - this is NOT about me. Being able to preach the truth is not something I take for granted, I know it's rare. Being present at Pride as a community of faith, being able to walk around and distribute our church cards to people in vulnerable populations, and those providing services to those populations - is a privilege. As is the kind of justice work to which we are called as disciples of Jesus. Being able to hang huge banners on the front of our church that proclaim God's welcome to all people, being able to invite everyone to our Eucharistic table, in the name of God's love.

You make this happen - this community, the way you embody discipleship is rare and vitally important to the mission of God. And this Sunday's Gospel acclaims the value of that understanding, that kind of welcome in God's name.

Specifically - you make it possible for truth to be proclaimed from your pulpit, for injustice to be called out, you embody our presence at Pride, you support our diocesan work toward racial atonement, our care for our immigrant neighbors, our extension of true welcome to the most vulnerable in our community. Including but not limited to the hundreds of meals we serve every Thursday and Friday evening. You make it all possible.

This community has a deep and abiding understanding of what being WELCOMING in the name of Jesus looks like. And you live that understanding with integrity. I am grateful to you, and for you.

In all honesty, I was asked to preach about stewardship today, and I've completely failed to do that. Except to say that what this parish embodies is important - for us, certainly - but even more so for the community around us. The way we witness to God's mission and love - makes a difference in this community and beyond.

As we consider Generosity June, and stewardship - that's what I would plug. That we invest in the greater mission that we embody. As we are able, we invest with our time, energy, and resources - to support and sustain this community, and share it with the wider world.

Which brings up two of the most uncomfortable topics for tactful Episcopalians - financial stewardship and evangelism. I'll leave the financial piece to our Stewardship team - who can speak to legacy giving, and other ways to support God's mission in this place economically.

I'll take on evangelism instead. I believe the world needs what we have to share, and that it's worth extending ourselves to tell the world about it, to invite others to be part of this community and the way we serve God's mission. Invite a friend to join you for church and then

brunch, or to come with you to the knitting group, to walk the labyrinth, to join us on a pop-up choir Sunday if they enjoying singing, to read or watch a sermon that spoke to you, and you think might speak to them. If you volunteer at St. Stephen's Table, invite someone to come help with you. Or to join you for another church project, or event.

You don't have to be over the top, just something along the lines of, "This is community good for me, and I wanted to share it with you."

Beloved Ones, together we: proclaim God's truth, fight injustice, protect the vulnerable, and welcome all people. **That's** the legacy of this parish, may we support and share it, now and into the future. Amen.

¹ Commentary on Matthew 10:40-42, by Stanley Saunders, Faculty Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia; originally posted by Working Preacher, June 29, 2014, Workingpreacher.org