

Hospitality
Preacher: Rev. Reebee Girash
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Hospitality
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
June 28, 2020 - Open and Affirming Sunday

Text:
Matthew 10:40-42

'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 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; 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.'

Prayer
Sermon

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." Jesus tells his followers at the end of his life. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25)

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

There are weeks when the text the lectionary offers is complicated and weeks when it is so simple it needs no further explanation.

Jesus tells the disciples to expect hospitality - whoever offers them hospitality offers it to their teacher, to Jesus.

Jesus asks them, and us, to be hospitable.

I think this is the core principle of our Open and Affirming statement, our PILGRIM CHURCH STATEMENT OF WELCOME

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We honor the Biblical call to love one another as God first loved us. We welcome into the full life and ministry of the church all people of any race, nationality, religious background, educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, economic status, and physical, mental, and emotional abilities.

This month we are debuting a new flag which incorporates welcome for our transgender siblings. It was not on the minds of Pilgrims writing the ONA statement in (2000?) to include the welcome of transgender folks explicitly - it turns out that few ONA churches originally included transgender folks in their welcomes. But the principle of hospitality, invitation, welcome, radical inclusion is there.

We learn and grow in our theology and its practice over time, living into our Christian faith.

In Bible study a couple of weeks ago, just days after the Supreme Court decision.... we discussed the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts. In this story, Phillip, an early church evangelist, encounters someone very very different from himself - someone who wants to know more about God. In the course of the conversation, the eunuch asks, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And Philip realizes: there is nothing that should stand in the way of welcoming this person into the

life of the church. So there on the side of a road, the eunuch is baptized. Hospitality. Welcome. Including folks whether they are just like us or different from us. This is central to the gospel. This has been part of the Christian mission from the beginning. It's even one of the things that made the early church so distinct: Christine Pohl writes: "Hospitality always included family, friends, and influential contacts. The distinctive Christian contribution was the emphasis on including...ones who could not return the favor." 1

(At this point I invited congregants to use the "Rename" feature in Zoom to add their pronouns.)

1 Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition, page 6

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Taj Smith told Sojourners Magazine how a church welcomed him as a young adult. Some of you know Taj as the Faith Director of Yes on 3, the 2018 campaign for transgender rights in Massachusetts. Taj is also a friend and former student of mine at HDS, and this story of his shows what it means when a church community gets it:

"The first Sunday I went back to my church after I came out as trans, I just remember standing in front of the name tags and staring at mine and thinking, 'I can't put that on,'" Smith explained. The name on the tag no longer reflected who he really was.

"One of the greeters came up to me, and she says, 'You need help finding your name tag?' And she laughed, and I laughed, and I said, 'No, I think I need a new one. I need a new one, like, forever.' And she went, 'Okay!' And she got me a new tag, and she said, 'Why don't you write your name on this one and we'll have a new permanent one for you next week!' And she handed me an order of service and I went inside and thought, 'That was the easiest thing ever!' That church became a safe haven for me." (<https://sojo.net/magazine/june-2017/just-i-am> – article by Austen Hartke, sharing Taj Smith's story)

Jesus tells us to expect hospitality, and Jesus tells us to offer it, as if we are offering hospitality to Jesus himself.

May it always be true that everyone feels welcome at Pilgrim Church.

Happy ONA Sunday.

Amen.