

Trinity 4 2026

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace, may I speak in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our gospel reading today is definitely on the shorter side, only a bit over 80 words, just two sentences. And all of it is part of a speech Jesus directs at his disciples. I don't know if you've noticed, but welcome seems to be something Jesus really wants to make a point about here. In this short passage the word welcome comes up a full six times! Seems something about welcome is pretty important to Jesus.

The passage of the gospel we heard today follows on from Jesus sending out his disciples to share the good news of God's Kingdom with words and actions. He gives them guidance on how to do so as well as warns them that it will not always be easy and that not all people will welcome what they want to share of God's love and care. And after all that follows the passage, we have just heard.

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

Whoever will welcome the disciples and their message of God's Kingdom, will be welcoming Jesus, meaning they will welcome God who sent Jesus and whose Son Jesus is. This is not the only time in Matthew's gospel where Jesus connects the treatment of fellow human beings with himself. Later on, in chapter 25 Jesus says that how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those without clothes and those in prison, is counted before God as how we treat Jesus, the Son of God.

So Jesus has just told the disciples that following him and sharing the good news of God's Kingdom is likely to bring some very difficult times for them and that some will likely mistreat them. But:

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

Whether or not people welcome them, really matters to God, to the point that God identifies with them. As the disciples follow Jesus and do his will, God cares about them. God cares that some people will mistreat them due to their commitment to follow Jesus and so to God how others treat them will be as how they treat Godself.

So much for the first sentence in our gospel reading today. In the second sentence Jesus describes further how people can be rewarded by God by welcoming prophets, the righteous and finally anyone in need of a cup of water. Welcoming people clearly is something Jesus sees as of great importance, with great rewards for those who welcome any and all whom God might send their way.

What does it mean though to welcome prophets, the righteous and just about anyone in need of some water? What does it mean to welcome? Has there ever been a place or a person who have made you feel truly welcome? What was it that made you feel welcome, what acts or words or impressions made you feel that you were truly being welcomed?

When we feel truly welcome, it likely means we feel we can simply be ourselves, come as we are, with all that we are, and we are wanted just like that. It likely means we are made to understand that we matter, we are listened to, we are welcome to belong and to be part of something. In places where we are truly welcome, the ways in which we are different from oth-

ers are not counted against us, but our differences are welcomed as something that can enrich and change a place, people and communities for the better. Being welcomed like that can be a transformative experience.

Prophets are not necessarily easy people to welcome. They might bring words and acts of comfort and encouragement, but they will also likely at times challenge us. Pointing out areas where we might fall short, or areas where we need to work on. That sort of thing is not always easy to receive.

Welcoming righteous people can also be challenging. No one is perfect, but occasionally we might encounter someone, whose words and actions challenge us, because we know deep down that what they say and do is good and right, but also difficult and it challenges us to do better in a way that might make us feel uncomfortable.

And then there are those in need, sometimes of something so simple as a cup of water. The needs of others can be a challenge to us as well, an unspoken demand on us to care, to share what we can, to be kind and generous, although we might not always feel like it.

How we welcome people, particularly those we might not find so easy to welcome, clearly matters a great deal to Jesus. And so it is probably not surprising that most churches somewhere, near their doors, on their website or in another suitable place have a message of welcome. Given that Jesus is clearly making a very strong point on the importance of welcome, that is clearly appropriate. But the words on a church door or on a website are only the smallest part of welcome. The true measure of welcome is how we as a community, here in church, in our neighbourhoods and in our homes live out welcome.

Welcome clearly matters to Jesus. The welcome each of us receives, as well as how we welcome others, particularly those we find difficult to welcome. But Jesus also tells us that a commitment to welcome others, even when it's

hard, also promises great rewards. Whom might Jesus be calling you to welcome? What might it mean for you to welcome people you find difficult? What unexpected gifts and blessings might come with welcoming those we struggle to welcome?

Amen.