

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, July 2, 2023, 5th Sunday after Pentecost, Independence Day Weekend.

Our lessons today fit comfortably with our national holiday weekend. A weekend when we are reminded of the welcoming words on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

Jeremiah the prophet (**Jeremiah 28:6**), thousands of years before, wrote: “May the Lord ... bring back ... all the exiles.” (The “exiles” were those who were separated from country and family.)

Hundreds of years later, St. Paul wrote about being “freed from sin” and “living unto righteousness.” (**Romans 6:22**) Slavery comes in many forms, but is subject to, gives way to, the “free gift of God ... in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In today’s gospel (**Matthew 10:40**), Jesus makes clear who he is and who his father is and what is the link between father and child. “Whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me.”

Yes, welcoming is what our nation is about and what our faith is about. Available to all, especially those who are tired, who are poor, who are yearning to breathe free.” Yes, Lady Liberty and Jesus of Nazareth have **welcoming** in common.

Our current challenge as a nation is in the details of the welcome. All agree on a need for clear procedures and an honoring of those procedures. Our task here is not to endorse one set of procedures over another set. Our task rather is to champion the freedom and responsibilities and joys that accompany the acceptance of Christ’s welcome: “Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”

With the understanding and the faith that receiving and sharing the Love of God in Christ is our particular piece of the whole welcoming enterprise. We are refreshers. That’s what we signed up for. We ourselves find refreshment in Christ, and we are confident that others will find refreshment in Christ. That refreshment is the “cup of cold water” that the Gospel of Matthew notes (**Matthew 10:42**).

One of the great traditions of church communities are potluck suppers. You all, we all, do such suppers really well right here. We are proud of our contributions and grateful for the contributions of others. We are nourished by these suppers, both by the food itself, and by the friends and neighbors and, yes, the visitors. All who participate are grateful. And, if for some reason, we didn't contribute to the food, no problem. Plenty to go around. Just happy to have you with us – whoever you are. Welcome!

And often part of the welcome is a self-introduction. Who are you? Where do you come from? Who/what brings you here? We want to include. We want to embrace. We want to get to know you, so that you feel comfortable during your stay. And besides, we like to welcome. We like to host. We feel like we are doing what we are meant to do.

And, as visitors get to know us, they might well ask “How can I learn more about you?” Well, we do have some literature, don't we. We have the Bible, we have the Prayer Book, we have Forward Day by Day. And, yes, we have a Website. And, above all else, we have a community, we have neighbors, we have activities, we have service opportunities.

There's a key word. Opportunity. Which goes really well with welcoming. What follows “Welcome aboard”? “Here's an apron!” “Here's a broom.” “Here's a hammer.”

And the beat goes on. The Story, the Good News, the Conviction, the Faith is safe for another generation. The Welcome has worked.

So, on this Independence Day weekend, let us acknowledge our welcoming roots and our welcoming responsibilities and our welcoming joys. What a privilege to be part of our national family and our church family.

Our final hymn today (#719) is *O beautiful for spacious skies*. **Spacious**. What an apt title for **Welcoming Sunday**. Right here, where we gratefully and proudly proclaim the Grace that God sheds, and the Grace that God expects us to shed.

It is welcoming at its best. It's not just saying hello to folks as they board the boat or the plane or the family or the company. It's that initial "hello" **plus** the follow-through. It's not "Welcome – see you later." It's "Welcome – let's get started."

A final thought and suggestion. As noted last week, the *Book of Common Prayer* is a wonderful resource, including a selection of prayers covering all sorts of conditions and situations and challenges. There are prayers throughout the Prayer Book, of course, but there is a special section called "Prayers and thanksgivings" on pages 814-835.

In virtually every one of these prayers, there is some version of "welcome – let's get started." An example: on page 823 there is a prayer for social justice. Here are the key phrases: "move every human heart" and "live in justice and peace." In other words, receive the welcome of God's love and then share that welcome.

"Receive and share." That's what we're about here. With the understanding that what we are about here is what we need to be about out there. People will know us by our welcome and our follow-through. And their lives will be better for the transmission and reception. And so will our lives continue to be blessed.

We are built to welcome. And we are built to share. It's the role that the Creator has assigned us. And it's the privilege of a life-time to accept that role and execute it. Especially in this wonderful chapel. Not just "Welcome – let's get started." But "Welcome – let's keep it up."

Amen.

Service of Holy Communion Pentecost 5 – July 2, 2023

Hymn 718 – God of our Fathers

God of our fathers, whose almighty hand
leads forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies
our grateful songs before thy throne arise.

Thy love divine hath led us in the past,
in this free land by thee our lot is cast;
be thou our ruler, guardian, guide and stay,
thy word our law, thy paths our chosen way.

From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
be thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
thy true religion in our hearts increase,
thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.

Refresh thy people on their toilsome way,
lead us from night to never-ending day;
fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
and glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.

Page 355

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the father. Amen.*

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us pray.

Pentecost 5 Collect

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

Second Reading – Romans 6:12-23

Hymn 716 – God bless our native land

God bless our native land; firm may she ever stand through storm and night:
when the wild tempests rave, ruler of wind and wave,
do thou our country save by thy great might.

For her our prayers shall rise to God, above the skies; on him we wait;
thou who art ever nigh, guarding with watchful eye,
to thee aloud we cry, God save the state.

Gospel – Matthew 10:40-42

Sermon

The Rev. Charles Rowins

Nicene Creed – page 358

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again In accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father,
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen*

Prayers of the People Form IV – page 388

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Confession and Absolution – page 360

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.*

*We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace – page 360

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Announcements and Preparation of the Table

Eucharistic Prayer – page 361

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise, you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Holy, holy holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: this is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion

Post Communion Prayer – BCP pge 365

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, And you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 719 – O beautiful for spacious skies

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain,
for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,
who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self control thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Lessons for 5th Sunday after Pentecost – July 2, 2023

Collect for 5th Sunday

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Jeremiah 28:5-9

The Prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing;

from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.

For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever;

you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one;

I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

'I will establish your line for ever,

and preserve your throne for all generations.'"

Happy are the people who know the festal shout!

they walk, O Lord, in the light of your presence.

They rejoice daily in your Name;
they are jubilant in your righteousness.
For you are the glory of their strength,
and by your favor our might is exalted.
Truly the Lord is our ruler;
the Holy One of Israel is our King.

Second Reading: Romans 6:12-23

Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus said, "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."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*