

**Proper 8 Year A RCL
Matthew 10:40-42
June 28, 2026
Holy Trinity Parish
The Rev. Ellen Echols Purdum**

“Welcome” seems to be the word of the week. For starters, it occurs six times in our gospel reading from Matthew, which today is really short, only three verses long. That much repetition is always a signal to pay attention.

And the World Cup is on, and perhaps like you, I have been glad to hear that so many teams and fans from around the world—those who could afford or manage to get here, anyway—are being welcomed by communities large and small. The city of Boston adopting the Tartan Army, those kilted Scottish fans filling the streets and especially the bars with good cheer and a whole lot of beer. The Mexican and South Korean fans wearing one another’s jerseys and cheering together in Koreatown in Los Angeles. The small towns and college campuses all over this country hosting teams from outside the US for their practice sessions. While surely not perfect, the welcome appears to be heart-felt and genuine. Good for them!

Since “welcome” seems to be the word of the week, I want to start by thanking you, Holy Trinity, for being such a welcoming congregation, for demonstrating such heart-felt and genuine hospitality as a community of faith. We hear this from visitors and newcomers, in all of their diversity of backgrounds, all the time. We hear it from folks who have been here for years, recalling the first time they came through our red doors and decided to make this place their church home. We hear it from the parents of children, our “little

ones,” who are so grateful for, among other things, the amazing worship bags provided by our children’s ministry. Shout out to Amy Wells! We hear it from the Decatur Emergency Assistance Ministry staff and volunteers who welcome our unhoused neighbors, folks the Bible also understands as “little ones,” in terms of their lacking power or status in our society. And recently we saw it in the data gleaned by the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta—yes, data does matter—that affirms the anecdotal stories we hear. I may be wrong, and I hope I am, but not all churches with signs out front saying “All are welcome” practice welcome in the ways that you do.

It’s important, lest we get the big head, also to say that we are not perfect. I certainly am not, despite the fact that “welcome” is my primary reason for being here. I forget names. I do! It’s hard for many of us to remember names, so let’s don’t pretend it’s not true. Wear those name tags and practice putting a face to a name! I mix up people, or their stories. I miss catching newcomers slipping out while I am listening to a longtime parishioner tell me something really important. I ask people if this is their first time visiting, and they say no. THAT is embarrassing, right? We need more greeters. We really do, so find Ann Lanner or Charlotte Pfeiffer and offer to sign up. Our narthex can be crowded and a little chaotic after worship, and we hope and pray for better welcoming space soon. We have more of the folks who come to Holy Trinity during the week for sack lunches and other support from DEAM visiting us on Sunday mornings, when those resources are not available, and that is both an opportunity and a challenge we cannot ignore.

But all our imperfections aside, you possess what I would call the charism, the gift, of welcome, and you demonstrate that charism in a myriad of heart-felt and genuine ways, so again, thank you. Matthew 13:43 says that your reward will be to shine like the sun in the kingdom of God.

There is, however, another reason “welcome” seems to be the word of the week. As I was typing away on my sermon about welcome this past Thursday, the Supreme Court ruling came down ending Temporary Protective Status for more than 350,000 Haitians and 6000 Syrians currently living in the U.S., and potentially for more than a million other persons from as many as seventeen additional countries. Temporary Protective Status, TPS, was established in 1990 through bipartisan Congressional legislation to provide protections for people from countries reeling from wars, natural disasters, and other catastrophes, the kinds of conditions described by the prophet Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading for today. While the protections were intended to be temporary, the original legislation made provision for extensions if the situations in those countries did not improve.

I do not think I need to suggest to you that immigration policies in the United States have been, frankly, a mess—confusing, contradictory, inhumane, ineffective. “Temporary means temporary” works only if our elected officials decide to make appropriate and necessary changes to the legislation they themselves enacted. You may feel differently. Bishop Wright always reminds us that our faith is political, not partisan, so I am not here to pummel you with any particular partisan pot shots of my own. But I am here with you to look again at

scripture, to wonder what the Spirit may be saying to God's people, and given that the word of the week from Matthew's gospel is "welcome," I found the Supreme Court decision to be ironic, at the very least. For one thing, Holy Trinity Parish has long and deep connections to folks from both Haiti and Syria. But the decision was more than merely ironic, I believe, for at least two reasons suggested by those three verses in the 10th chapter of Matthew.

One is what Jesus says about welcoming a prophet in the name of a prophet and a righteous person in the name of a righteous person. In order to offer someone a heart-felt and genuine welcome, to welcome someone as Christ, we need to learn not only their name, but also their story. You all know this, and you practice it, in the Life in Christ, Men's Room, and Stories for all Seasons Sunday school classes, at the women's retreat, on the youth pilgrimage with St. Paul's, in foyer groups, and while sitting on the bench outside the office door listening to one of our unhoused guests. Stories provide context—language, family, geography, culture, experiences of suffering, moments of joy—and context is what gives flesh to a person created in the image of God. In my view, this is what the Supreme Court decision has missed, perhaps especially in not acknowledging how the U.S. State Department itself has described the dangerous situations that still exist in Haiti and Syria, putting them on a Level 4 Do Not Travel To These Countries list. Or for not acknowledging the meaningful lives that these immigrants have made in the U.S., including, in the case of over 100,000 Haitians, becoming essential to the workforce in our healthcare economy.

To welcome a Haitian as a Haitian, or a Syrian as a Syrian, means taking into consideration their story and how that context continues to shape their story.

The second reason has to do with that gift of a cup of cold water. While we are at it, we might as well throw in the familiar section of a later chapter in Matthew, chapter 25, where Jesus talks about welcome in terms of giving food, and drink, and clothing, and care for the sick, and making visits to those who are incarcerated. People and their stories are not legal abstractions, and so heart-felt and genuine hospitality has to be extended through actions that are concrete, and which actions themselves offer context that shapes those stories.

This is all a lot to consider, even for those of us who, however imperfectly, possess the charism of welcome. Jesus does not make things easy for us to be disciples, which is a reminder that the gospel of Matthew comes with its own charism, its own gift. In Matthew Jesus is always upping the ante, including upping the ante on the practice of welcome. For sure Jesus understood that in religious tradition the law is important and not something to treat lightly, or even as if it doesn't matter. It's just that what is in the heart matters more. What Jesus says, over and over again in this gospel, to the disciples and anyone else who is listening, "You have heard it said, but I say to you," meaning I am calling you to a higher righteousness, one whose source is the Author of love who transforms lives by inhabiting and enlarging the human heart, which, finally, is what welcome is all about. As your minister for evangelism and new member integration, my hope and prayer is that our charism of welcome will deepen and grow, not by working harder—that is not what Jesus is saying—but by continuing to practice

**these habits of the heart with discernment, for faithful way forward for our parish,
our nation and the world. Amen.**