

TITLE

Order of Service (bulletin)

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Video (recorded live stream)

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June 28, 2026

Pentecost 3

Genesis 22:6-13

Abraham took wood for the burnt offering and gave it to Isaac to carry. In his own hands he carried the fire and the knife. Then the two of them went on alone. Isaac said, "Father!" "Here I am, my child," Abraham replied. "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "My child, God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. Then the two of them went on together. When they arrived at the place God had pointed out, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged wood on it. Then he tied up his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill the child. But the angel of God called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am!" he replied. "Do not raise your hand against the boy!" the angel said. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how deeply you revere God, since you did not refuse me your son, your only child." Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his child.

Matthew 10:40-42

Those who welcome you also welcome me, and those who welcome me welcome the One who sent me. Those who welcome prophets just because they are prophets will receive the reward reserved for the prophets themselves; those who welcome holy people just because they are holy will receive the reward of the holy ones. The truth is, whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones just for being a disciple will not lack a reward.



The Bible story from Genesis that I spoke about last week was - in my opinion - one of the most disturbing in all of our scriptural record. Now, if you weren't here or you just don't remember, that was the story of the very dehumanizing expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael by their slave masters who saw this mother and son as *less than*, as *disposable*: based solely on jealousy and perceived threats to status.

Today's reading from Genesis is at least as disturbing, maybe more.

Having won the legacy popularity contest, Isaac will now be all set to be Abraham and Sarah's soul heir and child of the promise. This was the actual plan behind expelling Ishmael to ensure that the secondborn son of Abraham would be the main heir. And Abraham and Sarah viewed Ishmael and his mother's turning away from

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camp as a fulfillment of God's plan.

As we heard today, it appears that God's plan was rejected. All that work of sending Hagar and Ishmael out in the wilderness (where Sarah and Abraham didn't realize they almost died of thirst) so that Isaac could be the only one left to be the heir. The plan appears to be solid and today we hear that that plan gets rejected. We started the reading today at verse 6. But rest assure God's plan was for Abraham to offer his long-awaited son and heir as a human sacrifice. For what? To please God?

The conversation in those first few verses is:

"Abraham", God says,

"Here am I."

"Take your son, your only son, whom you love. Go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

At least with the Hagar situation, the text says that Abraham had some misgivings about doing it. Although he eventually relented and went along with the plan. h

Here, nothing. He just gets up, gets Isaac, grabs some supplies, and they head off to the mountains.

Abraham accepts the rejection of the original plan that Isaac would be the child of promise and is fully prepared to carry out this new plan to kill his only son to burn him as an offering to God. Yeah, that's a disturbing story. It does not make this story any less disturbing and it does not let Abraham or God off of the hook just because the boy was switched out for a ram at the last minute.

Yes, I know that this story is metaphorical. It's a metaphor for unyielding faith that Abraham is ready to kill his son and mess up all the plans and it's a metaphor about God being a provider. There is the provision of the more appropriate sacrifice. And in fact, the story says they called the place the provision place because God provided. But if the sacrifice of Isaac is a literal account, and for people who like to read every story in the Bible as history rather than metaphor, most a lot of times; people still want to give God a bit of a pass because they assume that it was always just a test, that God never intended to put Isaac in any real danger. Either Abraham would follow the divine command as the story says and be stopped at the last minute as the story says or Abraham would refuse to do what God does showing his lack of faith and Isaac would be safe from the altar of flames. But, there's actually nothing in this disturbing text that hints that this was just a test and God was faking it. We want this to be a fake command, but the disturbing part is... it's not.

That's really all I'm going to say about the tale of Isaac and Abraham and the mountains of Moriah other than I'm glad that the pedocide plans were ultimately rejected. I can appreciate that what the author and the historians who carried this story on into the life of the early Hebrew people was that they wanted to show that being faithful was something that was possible even when it seems like it makes no sense to us and that God ultimately provides what is right. It's a good end result of the story, but as always, the ends seldom justify the means. Even a good ending, Abraham showing faith, God providing, even though if that's a good message, getting there in this way is - at the very least - disturbing.

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Welcome one sent by God as one who was sent by God. Welcome prophets as prophets. Welcome a holy person, a righteous person, as one who is holy or righteous. Welcome a learner, a disciple, as someone who learns and follows. Welcome a thirsty one with a cup of cold water. The Greek in that passage in Matthew in our translation today said a "lowly one". The Greek is actually the word for little or small. And sometimes

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people hear that when that translation is used to think that Jesus is talking simply about young children. But the language actually is *small*, not necessarily in terms of size or age, but small in terms of status, a judgment of power: people who are small in power and people who are great in power. And so lowly is actually a pretty decent translation to get a sense that this is not just talking about letting thirsty kids have a drink. It's about meeting someone who is in a really vulnerable situation: where they are.

Matthew is not really being radical or breaking any ground here with "welcome people for who they are."

Just welcome people for who they are. It's not that hard. Sure, it's not universal. Sometimes that request to welcome people as they are draws clarifying questions by those who are not quite prepared to be welcoming to certain people. You may remember the conversation in the Gospel of Luke: the story that's told in the other gospels about Jesus describing what the greatest commandments in all of the law are. Jesus was quoted in Matthew and Mark and here in Luke; Jesus and the legal expert agree that Deuteronomy 6 (love God with all your heart, soul, and strength) and Leviticus 19 (love your neighbor as yourself) are the greatest of the commandments. But it's only in Luke where the leader of the law wants to debate the definition of neighbor. Who is my neighbor? And it's Luke where we get the sometimes familiar story, the parable of the good Samaritan. In the end, when Jesus tells that story and the teacher of the law says, "Yes, the neighbor was this person who did help the person on the road who is in need." Jesus gives his answer to the question, who is my neighbor? And Jesus says, just be a neighbor. You are the neighbor.

I actually find it baffling when people resist seeing and accepting others just for who they are.

We're nearing the end of uh Pride Month 2026 and some of you know why June is generally recognized as Pride Month. It was in late June 1969 when police raided the Stonewall Inn in Lower Manhattan in New York City. Police raids on gay bars in the 1960s were relatively routine, but this one took place without any warning at a day and time when the crowds were high. Often the owners who sometimes as in the case of the Stonewall were criminal organizations, the mafia) were given some notice and the raids occurred in the early evenings, midweek when the crowds weren't that big. The notice was so they could get a lot of their alcohol out of there so it wouldn't be confiscated and people who didn't want to be dealt with by the police could leave. But this was an unannounced raid and it took place late on a Friday night, actually early morning hours of Saturday. So it's that Friday crowd. Patrol wagons were late to arrive and so people who were arrested were lined up outside. Crowds gathered along Christopher Street as news of the raid spread in the neighborhood. A crowd began to chant and sing there. According to some accounts, people sang, "We shall overcome."

But eventually, people started throwing coins at police officers and the paddy wagons, throwing beer bottles. Long story short, it was the start of several days of violent protest, less on Monday and Tuesday apparently because it was raining. But we know that even in the rain we do stuff. News spread around New York City and in other major cities lesbian, gay, and trans people were not being quiet anymore.

One year later on June 28th, 1970, a crowd gathered near the Stonewall on Christopher Street and called it Christopher Street Liberation Day. Simultaneous gay pride marches were held in Los Angeles and Chicago, often credited as being the first gay pride marches in the United States.

In 1971, marches expanded to places like Boston and Dallas, Milwaukee, London, Paris, West Berlin, Stockholm. In New York City, people marched all the way from Christopher Street down in Greenwich Village, 50 blocks or so north to Central Park. It made front page news in the New York Times.

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1972, you can add Atlanta, Buffalo, Detroit, Miami, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington DC, where people marched by the Capitol and the White House.

The queer rights movement had always existed, but *Stonewall*, the raid, and the riots of 1969 marked a more organized and widespread movement.

What was the message then? Same as it is now. Welcome and accept people for who they are.

Logic in history tells us that the plan of the politicians and the police in 1969 was to silence and keep down an identifiable segment of society. But with the leadership and the legacy of people like Martha P. Johnson, those plans were just rejected. Stonewall can rightly be seen as part of the wider civil rights movements in the US in the late 1960s. Civil rights movements and advocacy in all eras are practical means of emphasizing a rejection of plans that are unethical, that are dehumanizing, and that are just outright wrong. Plans that our most stubborn and afraid neighbors count on to not welcome people as they are.

Now, I wish I was reflecting on today's scriptures and only referring to events that were resolved in the past

Huge progress has been made in welcoming people for who they are in all sorts of aspects of civil society. Voices of opposition to equality are smaller. They are shrinking. But those voices, aware perhaps that their plans are increasingly being rejected, are getting loud and they have social media to make it seem like they are louder than maybe they really are. Unable to win over the hearts and the minds of the wider population, these voices are now at the point where they're trying to just convince politicians to legislate their plans. In some cases, close to home, they're having some success. That doesn't mean it's right.

And that does not stand against Jesus' instruction to welcome people for who they are. Jesus followed up on his plan (that we read a few weeks ago) to send disciples out on their own to the various towns and villages so they could cover more ground. The focus on those places was to put your energy in the places that are welcoming and accepting of you and just move on from places that don't: shake off the dust and go to the next town.

Today some related proclamations. Welcome prophets as prophets. Welcome righteous people as they are. The rewarding thing to do is to welcome appropriately. Just to be welcoming and accepting. "Rewarding" is a sign that we're doing the right thing. And it's not that complicated. When someone new comes near us, before we've got a chance to know any details about them, all we're basing it on is what we can see and hear. Take a moment to discover who they are as early and as quickly as possible. Try and figure out who they are from their perspective.

We welcome by getting to know our old and our new companions. And that will help us know how we can best be who we can be with what we've got: to be open in the public, to be intentional about what we say and do and be explicit about our welcome. We should want to make that real in our midst.

I only wish Abraham had had a chance to read what Jesus said today.

#31TLUS Queerly Beloved

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