

**Grace to you and peace, from God, and from our Savior who is Jesus, the Christ.**

A few summer's ago I stepped off a plane into a country where they didn't speak my language, though I was hoping to learn theirs.

It had been an early morning flight to Mexico City to learn Spanish for Ministry. With all the stress of entering another culture, I was ready for a nap by the time I'd cleared customs and boarded a bus for the language school in Cuernavaca.<sup>1</sup>

So I missed the cue that a bus attendant was offering FREE beverage and snack service! I caught on as my seatmate received a mouthwatering coke. But I couldn't, in that instant, after two years of lessons, think of the basic Spanish words to ask for water. I got out my phrasebooks, but hadn't gotten it in hand before my seatmate interrupted his own cell phone conversation to ask the attendant for something. He spoke so quickly I didn't get it all. But a bottle of water came, and I dutifully passed it to the gentleman.

"No," he gestured. "Para ti,.." And that I recognized as: For you.

He'd seen me. Been aware. Anticipated my need and ordered that cup of cold water for my poor, strange, weary, phrasebook-laden, tongue-tied self as I'd arrived at the door and threshold of his country. It was the kind of welcome that embraced and celebrated my presence.

Jesus says, whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. Whoever welcomes me, welcomes God who sent me.

That's a stunning, grace-filled word to us all, fellow travelers, on this Sunday we celebrate the gift of welcome at Immanuel as a Reconciling in Christ congregation and part of the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches. Today we celebrate the community of LGBTQIA+ children of God... out loud.

We hear today that when we are welcomed fully for who we are, and when we welcome others the same way, we mirror, acknowledge, and honor God's very presence in each other in a way that blesses each of us. Without the gifts of all the rainbow lives, we – however "we" identify and whoever is encompassed in the "we" – are the lesser. We are impoverished.

At bible study we talked about the ways welcome isn't just one thing. Welcome can be a toleration, a acceptance, or embrace and celebration.

Susan has a story about a time she felt welcome as tolerance. Susan *She had arrived as a consultant at a company at a day after the beloved person who'd led the office had been let go. Though they tried to welcome, the welcome was cold. She wasn't invited in to be "one of them".*

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<sup>1</sup> I attended Cetlalic, now called CILAC FREIRE (Paulo Freire International Center for Language, Art and Culture), for my three weeks of language and ministry immersion. I'm happy to say it was one of the first LGBTQ welcoming language schools in Mexico and still continues progressive programs for women, lgbtq folx, Spanish for medicine, for education and for ministry. I'd still highly recommend it! Homestays are great! Find them on fb at Cilac Freire.

Diane's got a story of being welcomed in a way that was a kind of "acceptance". *Diane was invited to a birthday party for her grandsons, but after they said, "Hi Grandma!" they were off with all their young friends and she was just sort of "there", on the sidelines.*

Elizabeth tells about the feeling of being embraced in welcome the first time she crossed the threshold at Immanuel: *Norm Williamson opened his arms, welcomed her, and she knew she was "in!" from that first moment on.*

Today we celebrate the gifts of loving out loud with an affirming, embracing welcome that recognizes Christ's presence, God's presence, in the face of our fellow journeyers and says its name. We think about this especially in these days when our threshold is a cyber threshold. We welcome not "visitors" but fellow travelers that are today's Immanuel assembly on zoom, from Massachusetts and the South Side, from Indiana and Iowa. Anyone else? Welcome!

What's startling today though, is a realization that the instructions Jesus gives his disciples aren't about extending welcome, but about *receiving* welcome; receiving welcome from prophets come among us. Receiving gifts from those that make that "us" and "we" ever larger with the prophetic witness of their presence. They call us to the continued work as well as the joy and celebration of a welcome that bears Christ. The work you have done that explicitly names LGBTQIA+ lives as lives that matter, that mirror God. The work that used to stop with lesbian and gay, but now enlarges our lives in celebration of the gifts of members of the bisexual, transgender, and non binary and queer communities, a gift that invites all of us to change a practice: normalize sharing the pronouns we use to identify ourselves, to signal and receive welcome for all. The intersectional work that proclaims black trans lives matter, as we say the names of Dominique Fells and Riah Milton and Selena Reyes Hernandez, the 17<sup>th</sup> trans life taken this year by hatred and fear.

We remember today that the Stonewall uprising that started Pride was a protest by and for the worth and safety and celebration of these lives, led not by straight folk, but by a black trans woman Marsha P Johnson, other trans folx and other gay men of color. The gift of celebration we claim today as Pride Sunday at Immanuel, started there, and changed "us." And we celebrate that!

"All are Welcome" isn't a marketing campaign of conformity: Come, be with us, think like us, behave like us, look like us. Jesus' words about welcome received in those sent among us, open, change and enlarge communities in life-giving ways. We receive different perspectives, outlooks and giftedness, and what we've been - becomes something larger and ever more looks like Jesus. To *receive* gifts of those who come among us, may be the most radical welcome of all, in Jesus' name!

We welcome our ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton today with exactly this word of celebration this pride month... I heard she has worshiped with you, and found you very welcoming! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjWgBigEugk>

Bishop Eaton reminds me: are there any Queer Eye fans here who've seen the season 5 premiere Preaching out Loud? This still amazes me: The Queer Eye team, Pastor Noah Helper's council members, and members of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, help ELCA Pastor Noah and his church in Philadelphia get his makeover.

In receiving that gift, in the way he's seen and affirmed by the team and his people, he receives deeply that embrace of welcome for his whole self and reflection of Jesus that his family and his church had denied him in his growing up. In turn Pastor Noah claims his own call and self worth in God's sight, to more fully share the stories and word of the gospel with others.

This includes his healing gospel welcome as an ELCA pastor to millions of tv viewers of this show! Just think about that! And the Queer Eye team themselves: who then join Pastor Noah in his effort to make the church not a place of the pain and judgement they have experienced in their own upbringing, but one of celebration of their lives with hope for the next generations! The gay men's chorus gets in on too! If you'd like to watch it together Tyler said he'd help me try to figure out how to do a watch party on zoom. Put something in the chat.

The ones we may think we are gifting and serving have the life-renewing gift for our communities as we flip our model of givers and receivers, and find a new sense of mutuality and solidarity beyond the world's divisions of privilege -- and charity or neediness. No "us", and "them."

In Jesus death on the cross for many, in God's raising the crucified one left for garbage on a hillside to the exalted right hand of God, we see God's model for this life. The host would become not just the servant, but the shared meal of life itself, *para ti*, for you. Jesus the host, AND the banquet of life itself, that multiplies every time it is shared.

All are welcomed to the table set for all who have backpacked over the desert to this table of grace as if they couldn't take one more step without refreshment. Together drawn into the circle of God's love in the faithful of every time and every place. Whenever, for Jesus' sake, we offer the welcome of even a cold cup of water to a stranger, to a little one, it is we who receive the surprising, rich reward of finding ourselves in Jesus' own presence. God's reign of resurrection comes.

So that finally, when we reach our eternal home, one of those little ones, with Jesus' own face, opens the door to greet us. Welcome, we hear. You, are welcome here. Happy Pride!

Amen.

Scripture:

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Matthew 10:40-42

The Rev. Dr. Kim L. Beckmann

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Evanston

28 June 2020 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost, Pride Sunday