



The New Epistle

a newsletter of

The Progressive Episcopal Church

Volume IV Number 5

July 2018

J U L Y



In the July issue of *The Epistle* is presented some thoughtful reading as we commemorate the 242nd anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. At this time of great unrest, increasingly rampant racism and nationalism, the establishment of concentration camps for immigrant children, might we contemplate the reasons the Colonies sought to

sever their relationship with the King of England. And as we do so, we might ask ourselves if any of those conditions that led to our declaration of independence are once again present today? And if so, how might we prevail against those conditions as Followers of Jesus?



Whom Ought I Welcome?— July 2, 2017

A Sermon by the Rev. Machrina Blasdell,
from the *Episcopal Digital Network*

Matthew 10:40-42

“Jesus said, ‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.’”

Just so we get this straight: whoever welcomes you welcomes Jesus, and whoever welcomes your friend or neighbor or family member or work colleague or elected official or mother-in-law or next door neighbor or chatty seat companion on an airplane or vendor at the state fair or grocery checker or barber or the UPS driver or the kid who hit your new car with a soccer ball...and so on and so forth...welcomes God? We could have fun with this! But would there ever be an end to such a list of those who are welcome? If there is an end to such a list of who is welcome, what does this mean? And if not, well- what does that mean?

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. And whoever welcomes any one of us welcomes Jesus, welcomes God.

The message we hear in this morning’s gospel reading from Matthew was important enough to Jesus and to the early church that some variation on this theme shows up in each gospel, and often more than once. Also in Matthew’s gospel from chapter 18 “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...” and from chapter 25 “The king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, ...you did it to me.’” Mark includes similar verses. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus declares that “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” The Jesus in John’s gospel, in true poetic style, declares in chapter 13 “Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”

There are numerous other examples and variations throughout the New Testament record. The bottom line emphasis seems to be on inclusion, reciprocity, welcome and doing for others—all those things it takes to build up community, to include the stranger as neighbor. If we can believe the record

of today's lesson and so many other passages, Jesus and the early disciples and later apostles put a high value on welcoming and proclaiming the presence of God thereby.

Pause for a moment and think about what we've been hearing through all the election drama and to the present day about division, exclusion, keeping people separated, kicking people out.

There may be legitimate and compelling reasons to consider the economic impact or national safety issues in such things, but if an inhospitable, exclusive attitude goes along with these ideas, then they are antithetical to the teachings of Jesus who talked so very much about welcome, inclusion, hospitality.

Hospitality is a primary ethic of the cultures and peoples of the Middle East even now. Whether one is brought into a family home of Muslims, Christians or Jews, there is joy in welcoming, there is the belief that it is desired of God, the welcoming of strangers who are strangers no longer, but beloved friends, believing that in welcoming people into one's home they are earning their crown in heaven, doing as God would have them do in welcoming the living God among us.

Such an understanding of hospitality, of the obligation of welcome, dates back to well before the time of Jesus. It was a matter of survival and community health which translated into the religious understanding of what God wants of us. Where and how do we experience such welcome today?

"Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'"

Is this what we hear? Or do we hear, instead, words of separation, words of breaking relationship, words of opposition and repudiation?

So many of the ugly attitudes playing out on the world stage and in the evening news have spilled over into our popular culture, showing up in a variety of television shows with comments about the increase in bullying not only among children in our schools, but flowing out into our neighborhoods, showing up in stepped-up immigration strictures and deportation raids, among other things.

Where is our witness to welcoming others, and thereby welcoming Jesus and the one who sent him?

This Sunday falls between two other occasions marked on the Church calendar: the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul last Thursday, and our celebration of American Independence on the Fourth of July on Tuesday.

It is important to note this for a number of reasons. First, think about Peter and Paul. They did not agree on many things, didn't get along at all, and finally went their separate ways in the proclamation of the Gospel. Peter insisted that the early believers must follow Jewish ways, must be circumcised, must hold to the Law. Paul's vision led him to distant lands proclaiming faith in a risen Christ and urging believers to conform their lives to that faith. What they had in common, though, was the conviction that God had visited humanity in Jesus, and that Jesus had brought something new and remarkable to humankind demonstrated in a way to live, a way to relate and a way to witness to God's

love. And they both understood that the welcome of God was an invitation to a place in God's kingdom.

As we celebrate this Fourth of July, and as we sing God Bless America, and as we roast hot dogs and hamburgers and marvel at fireworks and the good ol' red, white and blue, let us also ask ourselves what Jesus meant in telling us over and over again, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matthew 10:40).

We may believe differently about the details of faith, as Peter and Paul certainly did and as Christians are wont to do. We may understand civic responsibility differently; Americans have always held a variety of opinions on things.

But for us as Christian Americans or American Christians, the question of the day growing out of this gospel text asks: What does it mean to welcome, and how do we do that? What does it look like in our churches, in our neighborhoods, in our national policies, in our very attitudes? For we are Christians first, as citizens of God's kingdom, living that faith in an American context of privilege and challenge.

Jesus didn't say that we have to agree on everything, but he pretty clearly told us to be welcoming. Like Peter and Paul, we won't all agree on everything. And as Americans, we will stand proudly to celebrate on the Fourth. When we put all that together, one possible outcome is that we may have to agree to disagree on some aspects of American policy as we live our Christian faith in daily practice.

Christian people are called to be welcoming, for in welcoming others we welcome God. Can we at least agree on that?

As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, when we welcome strangers, we may be entertaining angels unaware. AMEN.

The Rev. Machrina Blasdell teaches religious studies courses online for Park University, with her greatest interest following the development and idiosyncrasies of religion in today's world. She enjoys time with her family, a number of cats and many roses, and delights in working with dark chocolate.



James Russell Lowell's 1845 poem "The Present Crisis", was an early work that addressed the national crisis over slavery leading up to the Civil War, has had an impact in the modern civil rights movement. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People named its newsletter *The Crisis* after the poem, and Martin Luther King Jr. frequently quoted the poem in his speeches and sermons. The poem was also the source of the hymn *Once to Every Man and Nation*.

The Present Crisis

by James Russell Lowell, 1819 - 1891

When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time.

Through the walls of hut and palace shoots the instantaneous throe,
When the travail of the Ages wrings earth's systems to and fro;
At the birth of each new Era, with a recognizing start,
Nation wildly looks at nation, standing with mute lips apart,
And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child leaps beneath the Future's heart.

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies with God
In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler clod.

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or wrong;
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast frame
Through its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or shame;—
In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 't is Truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng
Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
 That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Oblivion's sea;
 Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
 Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet earth's chaff must fly;
 Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath passed by.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
 One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;
 Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
 Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is great,
 Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn this iron helm of fate,
 But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din,
 List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within,—
 "They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin."

Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops, fellest of the giant brood,
 Sons of brutish Force and Darkness, who have drenched the earth with blood,
 Famished in his self-made desert, blinded by our purer day,
 Gropes in yet unblasted regions for his miserable prey;—
 Shall we guide his gory fingers where our helpless children play?

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched crust,
 Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 't is prosperous to be just;
 Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
 Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
 And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

Count me o'er the earth's chosen heroes,— they were souls that stood alone,
 While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone,
 Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline
 To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,
 By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme design.

By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track,
 Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back,
 And these mounts of anguish number how each generation learned
 One new word of that grand Credo which in prophet-hearts hath burned
 Since the first man stood God-conquered with his face to heaven upturned.

For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr stands,
 On the morrow, crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;
 Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots burn,
 While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
 To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

'Tis as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves
 Of a legendary virtue carved upon our father's graves,
 Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a crime;—
 Was the Mayflower launched by cowards, steered by men behind their time?
 Turn those tracks toward Past or Future, that make Plymouth Rock sublime?

They were men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
 Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue was the Past's;
 But we make their truth our falsehood, thinking that hath made us free,
 Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our tender spirits flee
 The rude grasp of that great Impulse which drove them across the sea.

They have rights who dare maintain them; we are traitors to our sires,
 Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's new-lit altar-fires;
 Shall we make their creed our jailer? Shall we, in our haste to slay,
 From the tombs of the old prophets steal the funeral lamps away
 To light up the martyr-fagots round the prophet of to-day?

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;
 They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth;
 Lo, before us gleam her campfires? We ourselves must Pilgrims be,
 Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea,
 Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key.

**Do not be daunted by the enormity
 of the world's grief. Do justly now.
 Love mercy now. Walk humbly
 now. You are not obligated to
 complete the work, but neither are
 you free to abandon it.**

- The Talmud

The Progressive Episcopal Church is a Partner of the Charter for Compassion. As a partner, we actively support these global goals of the Charter:

- We believe that a compassionate world is a peaceful world.
- We believe that a compassionate world is possible when every man, woman and child treats others as they wish to be treated--with dignity, equity and respect.
- We believe that all human beings are born with the capacity for compassion, and that it must be cultivated for human beings to survive and thrive.
- We know that we can collectively overcome the challenges that we face as a global community. To that end we support and work to achieve the seventeen sustainable goals of the United Nations.

[Charter for Compassion](#)



Thanksgivings for National Life (1979 BCP p. 838)*5. For the Nation*

Almighty God, giver of all good things:
We thank you for the natural majesty and beauty of this land.
They restore us, though we often destroy them.
Heal us.

We thank you for the great resources of this nation. They
make us rich, though we often exploit them.
Forgive us.

We thank you for the men and women who have made this
country strong. They are models for us, though we often fall
short of them.
Inspire us.

We thank you for the torch of liberty which has been lit in
this land. It has drawn people from every nation, though we
have often hidden from its light.
Enlighten us.

We thank you for the faith we have inherited in all its rich
variety. It sustains our life, though we have been faithless
again and again.
Renew us.

Help us, O Lord, to finish the good work here begun.
Strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice,
and to abolish poverty and crime. And hasten the day when
all our people, with many voices in one united chorus, will
glorify your holy Name. *Amen.*

Thanksgiving for the Social Order*7. For the Diversity of Races and Cultures* (p. 840)

O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you
for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and
show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until
our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all
your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*