

Mark 9:30-37
Pentecost 18B
Welcome Note
Pastor Lauren Dow Wegner
September 23, 2018

Over the last two years as a working mom,
I've taken to doing most of my shopping online.
Now don't get me wrong, I will always love roaming the aisles of
Target,
Or discovering I have some extra minutes to peruse a store.
But I've become a big fan of having things mailed to me.
As you know,
You can get anything online these days.
I'm a big fan of Stitch Fix and Thred Up for clothes,
Instacart for groceries,
And Amazon for pretty much everything else.

And when my boxes of clothes,
Or Dave's car parts he ordered,
Or even a boring necessity arrives on our doorstep,
Well, we pretty much always are a little excited.
"Ooooh, this must be our vacuum cleaner filters!"

I exaggerate. . .

But only a little.
There's something about receiving a package.
There's a part of us that's thinking, "Ooooh, what's this?"
And we even forget what we ordered sometimes,
Surprised when something is addressed to us.

Someone sent us something.
It's even better when we didn't order it,
 And someone just thought of us and sent us something.
We receive these packages,
 These items,
 Because they were sent to us--
 They were addressed to us--
 They have our names on them.

In our Gospel this morning,
 Jesus takes a little child into his arms,
 He speaks of welcoming the child,
 And the Greek word translated as "welcome" here
 also means "receive."
To receive something means that it was sent.
 That someone else was behind it.
 That someone intended that item--
 Or that person--
 For you.

And so Jesus says about the child he holds in his arms,
 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,
 And whoever receives me,
 Receives the one who sent me."

Now, the image of Jesus taking a little child into his arms is actually not the cute, sweet image of an adorable child sitting mildly on Jesus' lap.

Jesus taking a child into his arms and using the child as an example of connection to him and to the God who sent him--

Well, this had to be shocking and even outright disgusting to the disciples.

While in the eyes and hearts of mothers everywhere,

Children have always been beloved and cuddled and held close,

In the society and time in which Jesus lived and walked the earth, Children were honestly a nuisance to most.

They were cast-offs.

Unworthy of attention or care.

A child was a "non-person."

They could not contribute to society in any meaningful way.

In fact, if a married couple had no heir,

They would actually seek to adopt an adult rather than a child.

Childhood was a phase of life that simply wasn't appreciated,

And that's putting it nicely.

Children were easily ignored.

Easily discarded.

Which means that this child who was enveloped into Jesus' arms,

Received into Jesus' arms,

Was probably wandering,

Perhaps aimlessly.

Perhaps unwashed and unkempt,

Perhaps with little known purpose to his or her life.

A child was the last and least example that the disciples would expect Jesus to use in regards to welcome.

A child wasn't welcome.

But Jesus welcomes,
receives this child,
And asks the disciples to just imagine doing
the same,
And in doing so, to welcome him and the
one who sent him.

The etymology of “welcome” in our language is from the Old
English noun “wilcuma,”
Meaning “a person whose coming is pleasing or desired.”

When we welcome,
When we receive another with welcome,
We are saying to them that their coming,
Their presence is pleasing to us,
That we want them with us,
That they bring something
important to us and to our lives.
We are saying, “Oh! We wanted you here. And we are so
glad you are.”

We are saying, kinda like we do when we receive a package,
“Oooh! Who’s this? I want to get to know you.”

It is fitting that we celebrate a baptism today,
Where we speak “Welcome” to a child,
To baby James John.

(8:30) And last week, we spoke welcome to Paige Beer.

In just a little bit, we will say, (and feel free to join me in these words, because you probably know them by heart)

“We welcome you into the Lord’s family.

We receive you as a fellow member of the body of Christ,

Child of the same heavenly father,

and a worker with us in the Kingdom of God.”

We welcome and receive James. / (8:30) We welcomed and received Paige.

But we should ask,

What are we welcoming James/the baptized into?

Are we simply welcoming a sweet baby because he’s small and so cute?

Are we welcoming him into a bunch of adoration and love and a congregation of fingers that want to pinch his cheeks and squeeze his little toes?

Yes, but I hope that’s not it,

And I can bet his parents who are bringing him to the font this morning hope that’s not it, either.

Are we welcoming James into Sunday School and Vacation Bible School and confirmation and mission trips and all the ministry programming that is to come as he grows up?

Yes, but I hope that’s not it,

Are we welcoming James,

Are we receiving James,

As one we shall help teach and form in faith?

Yes, but I hope that’s not it.

Because our welcome actually says to James,

You are going to teach us, too.

You are part of us just as we are part of you.
This life together is not just about Sunday mornings, and classes,
and rituals.

This life together is not just while you are new to us/cute and
sweet, little James.

This life together is forever and always.

This life together is about hard stuff, too--

It's often about failing one another and ourselves.

It's about realizing we're not as great as we thought we
were.

It's about forgiveness granted to us when we can't
even forgive ourselves.

It's about hoping even when we are
despairing.

It's about life even when we die.

Because this is a life in Jesus Christ.

It's a life in the one whose arms first reached out in welcome to
us.

It's a life lived in the one who wraps us in his arms when we
are the unwanted and excluded,

The unsure and doubtful,

The worried and anxious,

The tired and weak.

It's a life lived in the one who opens our arms to the
unwanted and excluded,

The hungry and poor,

The annoying and disruptive,

The sick and dying.

Life in Jesus Christ begins in being received into arms of mercy and grace. . .

And life in Jesus Christ reflects that mercy and grace to the world.

My friends, you are the welcome note.

Not just written to James/the newly baptized.

But written to the world.

Not just written to the ones you love,

Or are most like,

Or most comfortable with.

You are the welcome note written by God to those who feel most ostracized,

Most despised.

You are the welcome note written by Jesus to those who are ignored and forgotten,

Those for whom it took forever to build up the courage to walk through these doors today,

And those for whom this place still feels so off-limits.

You are the welcome note.

Covered in crumbs of bread and drops of wine as you receive Christ's body and blood at this Table.

You are the welcome note.

Watermarked in the same promises that Christ pours over each one baptized at this font.

Jesus is essentially saying today,

“Whoever welcomes the most unwelcome welcomes me.. .

And not me, but the one who sent me.”

You are sent.

You are God’s welcome note.

To whom have you been addressed?