

Sermon for 29 January 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15 (UMH 747); 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

“Welcome”

“It’s so beautiful!”

That was my reaction to both of our services last Sunday.

In the first service, we gathered around one of our number to listen, and then to communicate our sympathy and demonstrate our promise to pray for all involved in the story we had just heard.

In the second service, it was the receiving of a new member into our fellowship, and the encouraging of still others who were all together with us for the first time.

The word “Welcome” was so apparent that it seemed right to lift it up today.

Welcome! We believe God draws us together to become more loving than we would be by ourselves.

Because our doors are open, God welcomes some who would otherwise miss the strengthening they need for the week ahead. We would miss the insights and inspiration they bring, too, if God’s welcome didn’t reach them through our being here.

We regulars are sometimes surprised by a word of scripture that’s so simple: “Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with thy God” ...

The idea of walking with Jesus came to me powerfully this week, as I walked through the Wyman Park neighborhood one cold afternoon. Because of my long training among people who speak of that and sing about that and teach about that, I was able to accept the sense of a friend alongside me, and within me, like the old song says: “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and tells me I am his own...and the joys we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.” I could reach out to accept this conviction ... I could welcome the welcome I was being given ... because I have spent a lifetime in a welcoming community.

As the examples of horror and distress mount up in the news ... and you can overdose on news, but surely we are here to share in our moment responsibly ... we are not Lone Rangers here... because the love of Jesus is alive among us, our life has welcome in it every day, to the great calls in Jesus’ teachings we read a few of in the Gospel lesson. You pray for me to be open to the grace in my hard times, and you know I pray for you in the same way.

Let us pray.

God, welcome. We say that in the faith that you want our friendship, and need our witness, and yearn to comfort us moment by moment. We spend some time in silence together to accept this, and practice this, now. (*silence*) We use this time to ask forgiveness, for so many things, as the scripture brings home to us our share in the great and small evils of our time. (*silence*) Because we have been welcomed by you already in this gathering together, we give thanks for your forgiveness as it comes, bit by bit, into the rest of our day. Bravely ... because together we can be courageous ... we pledge our allegiance to your ways of justice and mercy. Together, we go on, welcomed and welcoming, in your companionship, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.