

Centre Congregational Church, UCC  
The Rev Dr Scott Couper  
Sunday, July 12, 2023  
Fifth after Pentecost  
4<sup>th</sup> of July at Centre Church

“Holy Welcome”

Scripture: Matthew 10:40-41



First Lutheran Church of the Trinity, ELCA, Chicago, IL

This past week, my son, Micah, told me about a service opportunity he had with his mother, sister, and others in the desert of southern Arizona this past year. He, his sister, mother spent a week in Jeeps delivering water and food to certain geocache locations. As we all know, there are thousands, if not millions, of desperate human beings fleeing political repression, gangs, or economic destitution. They either cross the Mediterranean Sea in overloaded boats, or, as in the case in southwestern United States (from Texas to Arizona), harsh open hostile

dessert on foot. Many people risk life and limb and often spend much money to smugglers and ‘coyotes’ to work at our dairy farms in Vermont, our abattoirs and slaughterhouses in Arkansas, and our hotel and guest homes all across the country. For example, this past September in El Salvador, our translator, Alberto Hernandez, told Jenifer and I how he worked punishing hours in California (60 hour weeks) unclogging drains for Rotor Rooter. Micah explained to me how throughout the night they would drive along the USA and Mexican border in the Arizona desert mountains depositing life sustaining water and food to economic and political refugees. Micah even drew me an image of his experience (see?). Thank you, Micah. I am proud of you, your sister, your mother, and the many United Church of Christ churches in the southwest United States.

The second of the two verses from Matthew, chapter ten, reads that “whoever gives even a little cup of cold water to those little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I will tell you, none of these will lose their reward”. Likewise, in the previous verse Jesus spoke of those who welcome prophets and righteous persons will receive also rewards.

I wonder, what are these ‘rewards’ that anyone of us might receive if we welcome others? We might ask the Communalilty Asylum Seekers Project (CASP)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Community Asylum Seekers Project, <https://caspyvt.org/>, accessed July 3, 2023.

or the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC)<sup>2</sup>, as they welcome those from far away to Brattleboro. What is this reward that anyone might receive if they offer compassionate relief to another? We might understandably believe the ‘reward’ might be heaven. Perhaps this is true. It would be reasonable to assume so.

Yet, I recall a scripture whereby Jesus’ disciples, James and John, thought the same and they asked for their reward. Jesus’ reply was that they did not know that for which they were asking (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus suggested that the reward for welcoming and righteousness is ‘suffering’ – and ultimately, even death.

I also recall an occasion when Jesus said to the scribes and the Pharisees, “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town” (Matthew 23:34). It seems that John the Baptist’s ‘rewards’ were the same as that of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:1-6) and Elijah (I Kings 19:4-14): rejection and persecution.

I also recall the eighth beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus preached, ““Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Ah! Here, we hear that that the

---

<sup>2</sup> See Ethiopian Community Development Council at <https://www.ecdcus.org/>, accessed July 3, 2023

*'consequence'* of righteousness is persecution, but the *'reward'* for persecution is to dwell within the realm of heaven.

So, perhaps the rewards are criticism and condemnation from others and God's favor - both.

This morning as we approach the Fourth of July and as we celebrate the beautiful and wonderful rights, liberties, and opportunities that our country offers to us, let us pray for those like CASP, ECDC, and our United Church of Christ churches in the southwest conference who offer a 'holy welcome' to those in need. More important than prayer is marching in solidarity with Action Corp<sup>3</sup> for the abolishment of cluster munitions in this week's Fourth of July parade.<sup>4</sup> I have spoken to Isaac Evans-Franz and he welcomes our participation as a Just Peace Church in support of many issues of peace and justice. For my part, I am proud that I belong to a church that supports CASP, ECDC, and the UCC. I am proud that I belong to a church that just yesterday offered a 'holy welcome' to a family that lives on Elliot Street and a family that lives in Chicago during our 'School's Out'

---

<sup>3</sup> See Action Corps at <https://www.actioncorps.org/>, accessed July 3, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> This coming Tuesday, July 4, you're all invited to the following in Brattleboro: 8:00am: Action Corps Breakfast at Ellen Schwartz' on South Main Street. Email [eschwa1@myfairpoint.net](mailto:eschwa1@myfairpoint.net), if you plan to attend. 9:30am: Parade Line-Up on Flat Street 10:00am: March with Action Corps up Main Street and at 7:30pm: Party on Heifer Hill on Bonnyvale Road (behind my parents' house – RSVP for exact address, or just show up if you already know them, and feel free to bring a dessert or snack to share -- we'll watch fireworks over the hills). On July 12 at 2:00pm, we'll meet at the Common here in Brattleboro to talk about what we want to do here with our Action Corps Vermont team over the summer and beyond, with goal of all leaving with an action step in mind. In case of rain, we'll find a different meeting place. Please remember to email Ellen if you plan to join us for breakfast on the 4th. Let me know if we can expect you at any of the other happenings! Breakfast and parade details below.

celebration. I am proud that our church offers a 'holy welcome' to those who need food, child care, or even a bathroom. On this Fourth of July, let us continue in the name of Jesus to offer a holy welcome. And if we are criticized or persecuted by anyone, so be it. Let that be our reward along with the peace of Christ.

This was the Word of God. And it was spoken to the people of God. And the people of God responded, "Amen".