

October 11, 2020
Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Proper 23)
National Coming Out Day



St. John's United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, LA,
<https://www.stjohnsbr.org/gods-doors-are-open-to-all/>

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." – **Hebrew 13:2**

"Aloha. It meant welcome and homecoming. It meant love." – **Clemence McLaren**

"When you open your heart to a stranger you have welcomed another heart into your home."
– **Anthony T.Hincks**

"Hospitality is the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis."
- **Letty M. Russell**

"True hospitality is marked by an open response to the dignity of each and every person. Henri Nouwen has described it as receiving the stranger on his own terms and asserts that it can be offered only by those who 'have found the center of their lives in their own hearts'." - **Kathleen Norris**

"Life is a full circle, widening until it joins the circle motions of the infinite."
– **Anais Nin**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE: "You Are Welcomed" by Kathy Bullock *Patty Meyer, piano*

GREETING-WELCOME-ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us this morning!

Although we really miss being together in person, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being the church because we know that being the church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

Stewardship Sunday next Sunday

Next Sunday is Stewardship Sunday. You should have received a letter from our Resource Stewardship committee inviting you to consider what resources you have to offer for this upcoming year. If for some reason you have not received a letter, please contact Patty in the office to let her know.

All Saints/All Souls

On November 1, All Saints/All Souls, we will be asking for you to offer names and to light a candle for souls we have lost in this last year, family, friends, saints of this congregation or people in our human family we have lost this past year. We will also light special candles to honor the souls lost to the COVID virus and those lost to violence fueled by racism. After worship on Sunday, October 25th, I will set up a special zoom meeting to record these tributes for inclusion in our All Saints/All Souls service. If you would like someone to come and record your tribute, please call the office and speak with Patty. You can also mail a photograph of a loved one to the church for inclusion in the video memorial.

Today, as we approach Indigenous People's Day, let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki Tribe.
These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.

We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

**It is a holy communion we share of life on earth.
Of past and present, of pain and reconciliation
Of mystery and majesty...let us begin.**

SILENT MEDITATION & LIGHTING OF CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP

With joy and celebration, God welcomes us to this place.

How good it is to gather in the shelter of God's love!

With joy and celebration, we welcome one another.

**We greet each other by name;
we are equal in God's Kingdom.**

We open our hearts, to welcome God's love;
we open our arms, to welcome God's people.

Here, every single one of God's children is welcome.

OPENING HYMN: #368 "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" words: John Fawcett,
1740-1817;

music: Johann G. Nageli, 1773-1836 arr. Lowell Mason, 1792-1872 *Peter &
Mary Alice Amidon, Ellen & Larry Crocket vocals, Patty Meyer piano*

PRAYER OF INVOCATION: Welcome adapted from "Shaping Sanctuary" by
Gordon Brown

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome
here.

If you are old or young, noisy wiggly babies and children of all ages.

If you have brown skin, black skin, white skin, people of all colors, cultures
and abilities, you are welcome.

If you are married or single, gay, straight or bisexual.

If you are female, male, transgender or gender non-conforming.

If you are sick or well.

If you are happy or sad.

If you are rich or poor.

If you are a refugee or a citizen.

If you claim this religious tradition, or another or none at all.

If you believe in God some of the time or none of the time or all of the time, you
are welcome.

Come with your gifts, your pain, your hope, your fears.

Come with the traditions that have helped you and hurt you.

Come with your experiences that have made you and broken you.
Come with a mind, ready to engage, and a heart, open to discern.
Come and listen for the Holy Spirit that calls you to love your neighbor
wholeheartedly, seek justice, create peace and practice compassion.
You are welcome here!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

In Your house, there is room for all. At Your Table, we find a place set for us.
Yet we admit, Inviting God, that we find it difficult to be as accepting as You
and we find it easy to shoulder others away from Your feast. You fling wide the
doors to Your kin-dom, Welcoming God, but we are quick to try to shut them to
those who are different from us. Your heart is open so that all might experience
Your grace, and we reluctantly remember our ungracious words and deeds.
Forgive us, God of every person, heal our broken lives, mend our fragmented
souls. We know that until we are all free, none of us can be free. Open our
hearts to Your vision of the Kin-dom where all are welcome, all are affirmed, all
are beloved and help us commit to co-creating that world of welcome and
affirmation, until all people can access that promise. Amen.

Silence

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

“How Could Anyone” words & music Libby Roderick, arr. Peter Amidon GCC
Virtual Choir

CHILDREN’S STORY: “A Church for All” by Gayle Pitman, illustrations by
Laure Fournier

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

CHILDREN’S HYMN “I’m Lucky There’s a Sun” words & music by Nancy
Cassidy
Perrin Scott & Tom Yahner vocals; Peter Amidon, piano

READINGS: *Rosanne Hebert*

“The Guest House” by Rumi

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an
unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its
furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for
some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the
door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each
has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Matthew 10:40-42

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #617 "Write These Words in Our Hearts"

ANTHEM "I'm Gonna Lift My Sister Up" words & music by Faya Rose Touré arr. Mary Alice & Peter Amidon *GCC Virtual Choir, Mary Alice Amidon piano*

vocal score

I'm Gonna Lift My Sister Up

Words & Music © Faya Rose Toure
Arr. by Mary Alice & Peter Amidon

melody in alto

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of four systems of music. Each system has a vocal line in the alto clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The time signature is common time (C). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'I'm gon-na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy, I'm gon-na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy, I'm gon-na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy, If I don't lift her up, I will fall down.' The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. There are triplets and slurs throughout the piece.

I'm gon - na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy,

I'm gon - na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy,

I'm gon - na lift my sis - ter up, she is not hea - - - vy, If

I don't lift her up, I will fall down.

2. I'm gonna lift my brother up, he is not heavy . . .
3. I'm gonna lift my mother up, she is not heavy . . .
4. I'm gonna lift my father up, he is not heavy . . .
5. I'm gonna lift my people up, they are not heavy . . . (triple ending)

SERMON: “Widening Our Welcome”

I invite you to pray with me – May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight loving and gracious God.

Home, it’s a word that holds so many meanings doesn’t it? The dictionary’s standard definition is a house, apartment, or other shelter that is the usual residence of a person, family, or household. But really it is much deeper than that for most of us. Maya Angelou tells us that the “ache for home lives in all of

us.” She describes home as a “safe place where you can go as you are and not be questioned.” The best possible definition of home according to the song in the musical “The Wiz”, is “When I think of home, I think of a place where there is love overflowing.” This is, as I said, the best possible definition of home. But why am I talking about “home”? Because I think it is this ideal of home that best describes the “welcome” Matthew is talking about in this morning’s Scripture.

There were several options for the title to this week’s sermon, “Welcome Home” being one of them. I was also thinking about “How to be a Hostess with the Mostest”, but I chose the title “Widening our Welcome”. for one thing, because it is the title of a UCC campaign about welcoming all into the church. It also expresses the sentiment that you hear me speak every week at the beginning of worship - “no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey you are welcome here.” No doubt this slogan was based on the Matthew scripture today. Today we’re going to dive in to this our second slogan from the denomination we claim, from the place we consider our Spiritual home, the United Church of Christ, and more specifically, Guilford Community Church.

But before we go to the Scripture, I want to talk about the Rumi poem that was our first reading this morning. At first, the pairing of this poem with the Scripture reading might seem odd, but in the course of my studies this week, one sentiment that kept coming up was that it’s hard to be truly welcoming to others when you can’t be welcoming to yourself. Seems a little like a strange idea – being welcoming to yourself, but I think about the Great Commandment that Jesus gave us to “love your neighbors as **yourself**” and there it is again.

In her book [Amazing Grace](#), Kathleen Norris tells the story of a nun who, although she has Alzheimer's, still asks to be rolled in her wheelchair to the door of her nursing home so she can greet every guest. Said one nun of her sister in ministry, "She is no longer certain what she is welcoming people to...but hospitality is so deeply ingrained in her that it has become her whole life" (265)¹. Norris continues, "I read somewhere, in an article on monastic spirituality, that only people who are basically at home, and at home in themselves, can offer hospitality...hospitality has a way of breaking through our insularity" (267). We must first know how to love, be compassionate towards and welcome all aspects of who we are - both the parts of ourselves that we like and feel comfortable with, as well those parts of us that we would rather not talk about, the ones we’d like to avoid or the ones that the world has taught us we should be ashamed of.

Today is National Coming Out Day, a day first celebrated in the United States in 1988. The initial idea was grounded in the feminist and gay liberation spirit of the personal being political, and the emphasis on the most basic form of activism being coming out to family, friends and colleagues, and living life as an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person. I would say that

¹ <https://www.amazon.com/Amazing-Grace-Vocabulary-Kathleen-Norris/dp/1573227218>

coming out to one's self is most certainly an example of being welcoming to yourself, especially in a world that has often closed its doors to queer people. When I originally started planning for this worship service with the theme of "widening our welcome", I hadn't realized that Coming Out Day fell right on Sunday. There couldn't be a more appropriate pairing and in fact our Scripture reading today was the Scripture suggested for liturgical celebrations of Coming Out Day.

Our Scripture from Matthew is talking about welcome. The Greek word used in this section for 'welcome' is *dechomai*, meaning "receive", "take", and "accept". It is defined: to receive favorably, give ear to, embrace, make one's own, approve, not to reject. The Scripture is talking about a radical kind of welcome. The late [Rev. Peter Gomes](#) has said, "It's Jesus who redefines who the "other" is. There is no other, as far as Jesus is concerned." If you knew that Jesus himself was coming to visit you, what kind of greeting would you give him? Could you afford this same kind of welcome to a friend, to anyone you might come in contact with? This is indeed what we are being asked to do. As a church there are several things that this congregation does well when it comes to welcome. The church building and pulpit are accessible, it is an Open and Affirming Church and all one needs to do is look toward the welcome myself and my family received upon being called as your pastor, to see evidence of how GCC engages the ideas that the writer of Matthew brings forward.

But what about this line in the Scripture about welcoming a prophet? Why is being a prophet distinguished from others you might welcome? Well I would suggest that is because often prophets tell us things we don't want to hear or that may be challenging to the status quo. Again, if we look at the etymology for a minute, the words "host", "guest", "hostile", "hostage", "hospital", and "hospitality" all spring from the same Latin root *hostis*, meaning stranger or enemy.

To extend hospitality means widening the circle temporarily, perhaps taking a risk. Our generosity may be rejected, and we certainly dare not hope for thanks or reimbursement. To offer hospitality is an obligation. There is nothing soft or mushy about it. It has nothing to do with artificial standards of behavior. The bottom line is that it is far easier to welcome a friend, someone we're comfortable with, than to welcome someone who may challenge our ideas, just like it is far easier to welcome those parts of us that we like or are comfortable with than those parts of us that still "need work", or those parts of us that others, because of prejudice, have deemed unlovable or shameful.

The unnamed author of the letter to the Hebrews knew this: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it". (13:2) These words of advice can be comforting or alarming, depending on where we are, spiritually and geographically, at any given moment. It is hard for me to believe that I might be entertaining an angel, when the volunteer for the local public television station interrupts me at the

dinner hour with a phone call requesting money, or when the supermarket clerk refuses to make eye contact and leaves me feeling that I have intruded on her space. But many times, we might be entertaining angels when we are too busy to notice. These hospitality angels, like the Holy Spirit, can be very subtle. Of course, sometimes they are hard to miss, but all too often we just pass them by.

Once I get my office unpacked, you'll see that I have a number of motivational bumper stickers, cards, quotes and posters that I will have up. One of them is a poster which says, "There was a person who drew a circle to shut me out and I drew a circle to include us both." This is based on a poem entitled "Outwitted" by American Poet Edwin Markham. This stanza reads:

*He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in.*

It seems odd to be talking about widening our welcome, enlarging our circle right now, because many of our congregations are not meeting in person due to the pandemic. It is not safe to throw our doors open and tell everyone to "come on in!" How do we widen our welcome when we can't invite others "in", when we ourselves can't even be together? You hear me say every week that the church is not the building, and likewise I would say that our welcome and hospitality are not limited by our ability to meet in person.

What does it mean to widen our circles? Widening our welcome means going out of the church to offer welcome. The open doors aren't just about letting people in, they are also about going out. The church is being called to embrace the idea of welcome and hospitality in new ways right now. It's about taking that feeling of welcome, of home, out into our lives and the world. It's about taking that "cup of water" out to someone who maybe doesn't feel comfortable enough to come in.

I recently ran across this poem translated by Joanna Macy. It is a poem from the Book of Hours by Rainer Maria Rilke called "Widening Circles". The first stanza reads:

*I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.*

I invite you to live your life in widening circles, to live your life with a welcome wide enough for all, with hospitality, love and acceptance to all the pieces of who you are. That is how God loves us. That is how we are called to love. Bring a "cup of water out" to the least of these, to those who are known by you and to those who are other – to the prophet, to the stranger and yes even to the

enemy. You just may be entertaining an angel. You very well may be welcoming Christ. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord, we talk so easily about being a friendly church. We like to think of ourselves as a place where everyone is welcomed. But our welcome should not stay confined to these walls. We are called to adopt attitudes of hospitality to others who may not return the favor. We are called to be willing to take the risk of hospitality in our workplace, our homes, our community, everywhere we go. You reached out to people in all kinds of conditions. Many of those people had been rejected by their society, their families. They were in need of compassionate greeting and friendship. Jesus, as You have welcomed us, let us also be a welcoming presence to all in Your name. Amen.

ANTHEM “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” the Carter Family’s adaptation of a hymn composed in 1907 by Ada R. Habershon with music by Charles H. Gabriel *Sam Amidon lead vocals & banjo; GCC Virtual Choir; Stefan Amidon bass; Peter Amidon piano*

Words: Chorus

Will the circle be unbroken, by and by, Lord by and by?
There’s a better home awaiting in the sky, Lord in the sky.

Introduction to Prayers of the People:

This is the time in our service where I invite your prayers – prayers of concern or sorrow, prayers of celebration and joy. If you have something or someone you would like our gathering to pray for, you can type it into the comments section that accompanies this live feed.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE by Enfleshed (adapted) *Ken Kornfield*

In the midst of all that keeps our spirits frantic, overwhelmed, or troubled, we pause. We pause to remember each other as those whose precious and precarious lives are inherently bound together. We pause to remember the basic gifts of water, of trees, of beauty, of the land we gather upon. We pause to remember our neighbors - distant and near. And so, to the One who is Love, we bring the prayers of our communities. Where we share in joy or concern, let us respond together, “God, hear our prayers.”

Today on National Coming Out Day, we pray for all the queer, trans, and intersex children and youth across the globe. For the ones who are struggling with feelings of isolation and shame. For those who have no safe place or people to retreat to. For those who must be teachers to the adults in their lives. For those who are unsafe in their communities.

ALL: God, hear our prayers.

We pray for our elders whose labor we are indebted to. For the ones who never tasted the freedom they fought for. For the ones who were forced to the fringes of their own movements. For the allies who suffered beside us, casting their lot with us in true solidarity. For the ones forgotten and betrayed. For the ones who helped the world to widen their welcome.

ALL: God, hear our prayers.

We pray for *all* those who hunger for justice and liberation today. For the ones who lay down their lives for their friends. For the ones who tell the truth. For the ones who take risks, who dream, who feed and pray, who fight for bread and roses, both. For the ones who are eager to learn and grow and offer their gifts to the work of enfleshing your promises.

ALL: God, hear our prayers.

We pray for all who are suffering in the church and the world at the hands of white supremacy. For those imprisoned by the state. For those whose land has been taken. For the earth that groans beneath us. For those without food or housing. For those fighting to recover from addiction and illness, corona virus and others. For those experiencing economic hardship. For those who have yet to repent.

ALL: God, hear our prayers.

We pray in gratitude for all that nourishes and sustains us. For the gifts of beauty and friendship, shared meals, and art, and love. For laughter. For pleasure. For the friends, lovers, and comrades who lift our spirits, always by our side when the days are heavy. For families, the ones we are born into, our family of choice and for our church families who help us know our own belovedness. For the freedom we have in Christ.

ALL: God, hear our prayers.

For your presence within and around us, in our highs and lows, our hope and our despair, God, we give you thanks. Hear our prayers and deepen our willingness to show up with and for one another, sharing in each other's burdens and working to protect and care for one another. We pause now for a moment to allow you to silently or vocally offer your own prayers.
God in your mercy...

ALL: hear our prayers. Amen.

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us, using whatever words help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the kin-dom of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day

our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: #278 “Hear Our Prayer, Oh God”

OFFERTORY

Call for Offerings

Embraced by God and loved for all that we are, let us embrace the Church and the world, as we share what we have, to bring God’s love and justice to all.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail - 38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301 or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church’s website and clicking the [Paypal donation button](#) on the home page (Paypal takes 2% of that gift).

So now let us gather up all these offerings, as well as the offering of our time and talents, and dedicate them to continuing the work of God’s justice in the world.

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

We are all one human family. In Your love You created us. Through Your grace You reach out to us. You are great enough to hold us all in Your arms at the same time. Help us to open our hearts to the world that You love. Teach us to weave our lives together. We yield to Spirit, offering what we have to the greater good. In this way, each day, we begin again in love. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: #367 “Break Not the Circle” words Fred Kahn 1975, music Margaret Tucker 1997 *Cathy Hess vocals, Peter Amidon piano*

BENEDICTION

Come out! Come out of the church building, come out of your homes, come out and embrace all that makes you God’s beloved. Welcome everyone you meet with radical hospitality so that they too may know their own belovedness. And as you embody this truth and work for justice, you can be sure that God goes with you, ahead of you to clear the way, beside you to sustain you when the road is rough, and behind you to pick you up when you are weary! You do not walk alone! Go in peace with courage! And let all God's people say: **Amen!**

THREEFOLD AMEN

POSTLUDE: “Welcome Holy Spirit” by Mark Condon *Patty Meyer, piano*

Resources for additional prayer and reflection

[The History of National Coming Day](#)

[All of Us from Considering Matthew Shepard, Craig Hella Johnson | LSU A Cappella Choir](#)

[Thank You Prayer for National Coming Out Day](#) by Enfleshed

[Open and Affirming Coalition Webinars](#) – a series of educational webinars for churches taking steps towards becoming Open and Affirming but also provides some good basic information about how to support LGBTQ+ members of the congregation and community.