

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2020
PENTECOST 4
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
SOMERS POINT, NJ 08244
INTERIM PASTOR: REV. KEVIN HILGENDORF

“Jesus Welcomes All”



I will miss going to Christ Church Upper Darby on zoom since it is the same time we meet here at Grace to worship. I will miss sending my sermon video in 4 parts to Jill Welfield and Shawn who put the services together on Grace's website. I'm grateful she and Shawn didn't trim my sermons for it to fit the time allotted.

My first experience of hospitality at Grace, was my meeting with Grace's council. It was a rainy night. Parked on the north side of the church, I walked to the well-lighted door, rang the bell, waited, then returned to the car, drove to the other side of church, parked (still raining), tried the door, no results. I was early so I decided to wait in the car. Soon I saw people arrive and enter another well lit entrance. I followed and entered a meeting room and felt I made it. After observing the new surroundings, I realized this was not the council meeting place. I decided to walk up the stairs and asked a group of men where the church council meets. Eddie smiled welcoming me to Grace and showed me the way. We have Jesus' promise, "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me."

Elizabeth Johnson, a professor, explains hospitality, "In the ancient world identity was tied to family and community. It was understood that in showing hospitality, one welcomed not just an individual but implicitly, the community who sent the person and all that they represent. Therefore welcoming a disciple of Jesus would mean receiving the very presence of Jesus himself and of the one who sent Him, God the Father.

Eddie not only represented himself, but also you, the community of Grace, and Jesus in his act of hospitality.

Elizabeth also shares a story on welcoming. "Recently a friend told of an interaction with a bagger at her local grocery store. She had been talking with this woman off and on for a year, and upon learning that she no longer worked on Sundays invited her to come to her church, to their casual, outdoor, come-as-you-are-service. Much to my friend's surprise, the woman responded with gratitude for the invitation. We have Jesus' promise, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." I like this quip, "Our faith should be a steering wheel not our spare tire." This is by (I'm not making this up) C. L. Wheeler.

Rev. Jeff Thiemann (president and CEO of Portico) wrote in his e-mail, "I'm hearing from every corner of the ELCA that this unusual, challenging time is shining a light on an enduring truth-our mission is not defined by our ability to gather but by our ability to serve others, for the sake of the world." He mentions Bishop Eaton's response in a recent nationally televised interview: "Our church has never been closed and our work of social justice and our work of feeding and caring for the most vulnerable has never stopped-and neither have our prayers." We have Jesus promise, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me."

Here at Grace, leaders and volunteers prepared this safe space for worship. Volunteers continue to serve the hungry from the food pantry. Diana continued to keep the office functioning in serving Grace's community and others. Jill and Shawn, Scott, and volunteers worked to keep the services on Grace's website. And others behind the scenes to keep the mission of Christ on going in and around Grace, we have Jesus' promise, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me."

Recognize these words? Through God's Word and the Holy Spirit, Grace Lutheran Church will be...

- Inviting all people to **belong** to the church of Jesus Christ.
- Equipping those who **believe** as faithful disciples of Jesus.
- Sending members to **become** caring servants of God in the world.

In the gospels Jesus linked welcome with physical signs: cold water for the parched, food for the hungry, rest for the weary, and accompaniment with those who are alone. These too are signs of God's wide welcome.

Let us pray: Open the doors of our hearts to welcome all people to the glory of your name.
Amen.