

June 28, 2020 • Scholarship Sunday • Online Worship

## **“A Life That Is Worthy”**

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

*Psalm 13*

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my  
enemy be exalted over me?*

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*

*I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

*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.”*

I’m going to address this homily this morning primarily to our scholarship recipients, but I want to invite everyone to listen in to see if maybe there’s a word here for you today as well.

To our scholarship recipients—congratulations! You know that these gifts come out of the love of this congregation—love for you, love for learning, love for passing along the most important things in life from generation to generation. These scholarships represent wise stewardship of time-honored values of the past now paid forward as living investments in the next generation.

The awarding of our scholarships this year, in the midst of our response to the two pandemics of the coronavirus and of racism, the awarding of scholarships this year, 2020, also invites us to recommit ourselves to our deepest values and commitments. What kind of people do we want to be? What values do we chose to hold up and carry forward? How do we live with intentionality, with purpose, towards the creation of a safer, more just, more beautiful, more whole....world, for God’s creation and all God’s children?

This is a life-long quest, to be sure. Always growing into greater love of self, God, and neighbor. Expecting to be made perfect in love in this life, as John Wesley put it. This moment in history invites us, compels us all to go deeper. To think again. To go even deeper and to recommit, again and again and again.

I want to offer today’s Gospel reading as a little spiritual puzzle, a teaser if you will, to help keep your heart and mind nimble and curious as you move along your spiritual path. “Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me,” Jesus said, ...”whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of those little ones in the name of a disciple—none of these will lose their reward.” Consider this with me for a moment...

My hunch is that when we hear this passage, we first think of our responsibility to welcome those who come to us in need and to respond, right? The homeless, the hungry, the poor, the immigrant...it’s why we go on mission trips, support the food pantry, work on the Habitat Build, and so forth. John Wesley is said to have put it this way: “Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.”

In this framework, we see ourselves as the “welcomers,” those providing welcome, those reaching out to respond to those in need.

Now, here’s the intriguing part. I invite you to turn that framework inside out for a moment. It puts us all in a different light. Because Jesus was addressing these words to his own disciples, those he was sending out into the world with nothing, just a walking stick, the clothes on their back, nothing more. They went out in his name to



teach and preach and heal, showing up at people's doors hat in hand. They were the ones who needed the offer of a cup of water, a meal, a place to spend the night. They were not the welcomers, but rather they were the "welcomees," we might call them, not those in a position to offer welcome, but those in the position of needing to be welcomed, relying on the kindness of strangers.

So if, in our lives, we're more comfortable seeing ourselves as the welcomers, the doers, those who have much to give—and we do!—I invite us to also take on the identity of being "welcomees," standing in the need of prayer, indebted always to the unmerited grace of God, learning, as the prophet Micah puts it, how to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. Humbly.

This moment in history invites and challenges us to think in new ways about how we understand ourselves to be in relationship with each other and in relationship with the whole creation. It's empowering and it's deeply humbling. It's a moment for each of us to ask ourselves, to ask God in prayer: who am I am? How do I want to live each day? Whom will I welcome?

And ask yourself as well: what part of me longs to be welcomed into new life? What within me longs for the love, the forgiveness, the grace, the deep hope that comes only from God? Find some moments and a place apart for prayer. Remember—prayer isn't so much about telling God things God already knows. As one writer says: "It's mostly about emptying your head and waiting for stuff to become clear...to shut up for awhile and think...holding people [and everything going on around you] in a kind of compassionate concentration...", a time to hear your inner voice, to dwell in the peace of God, and let God guide your thoughts and actions and words in the path of truth.

We are always both the *welcomer* and the *welcomee*.

To our scholarship recipients today, I want to say: May God's full blessings be upon you as you pursue your studies and expand your minds. May you use your knowledge and the privilege it affords to serve others and may whatever privilege and status you attain through these pursuits enable you to give back more generously to those still in need. And as you learn, as you grow, as your knowledge increases, may your love and knowledge of God increase as well. May you live more compassionately, more faithfully, and more boldly. May you live out loud.

AMEN

Notes:

Diane Roth. Living by the Word. *The Christian Century*. June 17, 2020.

Casper ter Kuile, *The Power of Ritual*. Interviewed on NPR Morning Edition, June 23, 2020.

Giles Fraser. "Prayer is not wishful nonsense. It helps us shut up and think." *The Guardian*, March 23, 2017.