



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Overwhelming hospitality

Fourth Sunday after Trinity/Proper 8

Romans 6: 12-end and Matthew 10: 40 -end.

Sunday 28th June 2026

The Venerable Ruth Patten, Archdeacon of Colchester

I don't know if you have ever been in a situation where you have been overwhelmed by the hospitality that you have received, when there has been immense love and care in the welcome that you have been offered? I would like to begin today by telling you about my most memorable experience of hospitality. It happened several years ago when I was in Kenya.

Our Diocese has a long-standing relationship of over 40 years with the dioceses around the East of Mount Kenya, with regular visits to and from Kenya of clergy and lay people, including a significant schools' link programme. This area stretches from the low south-eastern slopes of Mount Kenya and extends right up to the border with Ethiopia. There is a huge variety within this eastern area, from the lush tea plantations and agriculture of the mountain slopes to the varying degrees of desert in the north, inhabited by semi-nomadic peoples. Kenya as a whole is rich in resource and has enough for each citizen. But as we know only too well, that doesn't mean that each person will have enough.

As we travel north into the Diocese of Marsabit, the landscape changes, the earth is cracked and dry, market stalls have more limited produce and camels are a common sight on the roadside. We visit the nomadic, pastoralist communities with their traditional homes. These communities will live in an approximate area, moving around to access the best sources of food and water for their livestock.

We are always greeted with such warmth, hospitality, and joy, often with dancing and singing as a greeting. In Kenyan culture, hospitality is hugely significant, and visitors are treated as a blessing. The arrival of visitors is a real community event, with people walking several miles to join us. And they will **always** offer food and drink to us, as a sign of friendship and welcome. In the northern part of the country, these communities are not materially rich: they live in a very arid part of the country, regularly prey to water shortages and food shortages. However, this is never evident in their hospitality. They always offer the very best of what they have to visitors, and it is a very humbling experience.

You may recognise this kind of hospitality and welcome from your own experience or from the rich diversity of cultures that make up our own communities. In this experience of

hospitality there are resonances too with what we know about Middle Eastern hospitality. Food, feasting and meals punctuate the gospels and we encounter Jesus in these spaces, sharing hospitality with “the great and the good” and with “sinners and tax collectors” alike.

We hear more of the importance of hospitality and welcome from Jesus in our gospel reading today. These are words of encouragement to the disciples at the end of a chapter where they are called and sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God as they go. In welcoming either friend or stranger, we welcome Jesus, and in welcoming Jesus we welcome God. Welcome and hospitality are really significant because they say something about how we seek to relate to people. Are we willing to embrace the new and the different, the excluded and the marginalised, because that is what true welcome and hospitality is likely to require of us. How we **do** hospitality and welcome will change us, because welcoming people widens the circle of the invited.

It is easy to see these few verses as advice about how to offer hospitality and welcome. However, the emphasis is the other way around, it is on the recipient of hospitality. Whoever welcomes **you**, welcomes **me**, says Jesus. We are put in the place, not of the giver, but of the receiver. This is promise not commandment. In the wider context of this chapter in Matthew’s gospel, this is no surprise. Jesus has been teaching his disciples about how to go out and proclaim the gospel, how to go out and teach and heal, in his name. Earlier in the chapter he encourages them to go out and travel as lightly as possible, dependent on the hospitality of those they encounter on the way. As ambassadors for Christ, those who welcome them, welcome Christ who sent them and welcome God who sent Christ.

As the one offering welcome or hospitality, we have the control and power in the relationship, not least over how long hospitality is offered. As the recipient, you are vulnerable, at the mercy of the welcomer! This puts you in a place of vulnerability. Jesus was sending his disciples out in this state of vulnerability, which is based in humility. This should be no surprise. This is how God entered the world. God becoming human in Jesus Christ was a consciously vulnerable act. As one person has put it, “God had to trust in the welcome of the world” to make a home in the world. In this, God is saying something about

God's own hospitality and welcome. Such is **the hospitality of God**, that through Jesus Christ, God joined in fellowship with humanity. This is an overwhelming act of love and sacrifice, offered freely because this is how God longs to relate to us, to be with us. There is nothing transactional about this, no expectation of what may be offered in return or how that might be quantified. But we are invited to respond (invited not expected or required or coerced); we are invited to find a way to give expression to what this gift might mean to us.

In our epistle, Paul continues to reflect on the liberation that God brings into the life of each Christian through the power of the resurrection. Earlier in chapter 6, Paul has been reminding people of their baptism. Through our baptism, we enter into a new way of life, we are set apart, made holy. Sin shall no longer have dominion over us. Except of course – as Paul recognises - we are all too human and we are continually vulnerable to sin, to “misdoings”, to following “the devices and desires of our own hearts” (as the Prayer Book puts it). We are continually vulnerable to shutting ourselves off from the knowledge of God's love for us. We know that there are times when the connection between our very selves and what we've chosen to do is not good for us or for others. In the widest sense, this is unhealthy for us, it can deaden us. Repentance as a holy habit is how we can, again and again, turn away from sin and turn to God, it is how we can receive the new life offered to us. This is how we can live out our baptismal promises for ourselves, day by day, week by week. This is why the time of corporate confession is important as a part of our gathered worship. Together we acknowledge our brokenness and the brokenness of the world, together we receive forgiveness of sins and the promise of God's longing to restore all that God has created.

God offers us such hospitality and welcome into God's very heart, through the gift of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are welcomed into relationship, into the community of the Holy Trinity. And we will spend what remains of our lives in wonder and awe at this mystery as we learn more of God. There are times when we need to rest in this relationship, be restored by it, in personal and private prayer and devotion as well as in gathering together for fellowship and worship. But, when we have known welcome and restoration offered so abundantly and freely by God, we are invited to share it in whatever

ways we can. Our world can be inhospitable and unwelcoming, polarised and fearful of diversity, ever restricting the circle of the invited. God calls us to witness to God's hospitality, which we have encountered within the community of the Holy Trinity. God calls us to witness to this hospitality in the communities in which we live and work and make our lives. We are called to go into our daily lives both bearing and expecting to encounter the overwhelming welcome and hospitality of God. **Amen.**