



Rector's Essay

All are Welcome to Encounter God in Jesus Christ **(Growth part 2)**

By Jarrett Kerbel (08/30/26)

Since before I can remember the motto of our national church has been, “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!” Somewhere along the way the church seemed to forget why we extend such a generous welcome. The full welcome - at least as far as I am concerned - should be “The Episcopal Church welcomes you to encounter God in Jesus Christ.”

A combination of encroaching theological liberalism and panic over declining attendance, caused our church to forget the aim of welcome and to offer substitutes instead. In addition, we have enshrined a culture of aloof skepticism about faith that prioritizes doubt over discipleship, i.e. the practices of a spiritual student seeking saving wisdom from our higher power. The cost of this forgetfulness has been more decline, and a disconnect from our true mission.

I strongly believe that our best gift to offer seekers is the Gospel and that we are called to grow as a congregation by offering that gift. Our mission statement calls each of us to know and share the love of Jesus. With each newcomer we have that opportunity.

Encounter with God leads to different journeys for different people who enter our doors - member and newcomer alike. For some, the freely bestowed love of God will help that person feel accepted as a person for the first time in their life. Shame will drop away and joy will arrive in its place. For others, God's love will come as forgiveness and mercy, a relief from burdensome guilt. Some will experience spiritual healing in body, mind and spirit through God's love. Others will receive God's love and accept the invitation to surrender, admitting powerlessness over substance abuse

or other compulsions. Some will experience God's love and feel a call to repent from behavior that rejects God's love.

One example I use to help folks understand the generous words, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes you (to encounter God in Jesus Christ)," may appear somewhat shocking at first. If an active member of the KKK or a neo-Nazi group came to St. John's, would they be welcomed? My answer is, yes. Now, stick with me, would they feel comfortable here? Would they feel like the Gospel proclaimed and preached in this place supports their white-supremacy, anti-semitism, and devotion to violence? Absolutely not, if we are preaching the Gospel correctly. For these active members of hateful organizations, the encounter with Jesus Christ can only lead to repentance and amendment - indeed overthrow - of their lives.

The love of God is freely offered by God, it is more powerful than all that opposes it, and Divine love is a force to be reckoned with. We all will be transformed by it. For all of us who know this path and are grateful for it, our call is to offer it to others.