

"Welcome's Reward"

Rev. Dr. Peter Bynum

June 28, 2026

⁴⁰"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever 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; ⁴²and 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." (Matthew 10:40-42)

On the first full day of our Scotland pilgrimage, on our walking tour of the city of Glasgow, we passed a memorable sight outside of the Gallery of Modern Art. A statue of the Duke of Wellington on horseback memorializing his great victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, was accented by an orange traffic cone on his head. I assumed it was a recent prank by some ambitious teens, but our tour guide explained that this was a longstanding, cherished tradition in Glasgow. It probably began as I suspected – some young Scots wanting a laugh. But every time the city government took it down, somebody put it right back up there. It became a running gag, and then an enduring symbol of the good-natured Scottish sense of humor -- and a not-so-subtle reminder that no government should ever take itself too seriously.

So, when Scottish soccer fans descended upon Boston last week for the World Cup and encountered another famous military and political figure on horseback, they saw an opportunity to share their beloved tradition, in a spirit of goodwill, with their American hosts. As shown on the cover of your bulletin, the "Tartan Army" honored General George Washington with the Duke of Wellington treatment. And Boston responded in the same spirit – not with umbrage, but with appreciation for a good laugh, and a recognition of our shared heritage in government that is by the people, for the people.

Like many people, I have been floored by the outpouring of positivity that came out of the Scottish invasion of Boston. While traveling bands of so-called "hooligans" have historically earned bad reputations when traveling abroad, the traveling Scots left only warm and happy feelings in their wake. From nearly every perspective, the visit of the Tartan Army has been a gift -- an authentic moment of joy, hospitality, mutual affection, and gratitude.

In an open letter, the *Boston Globe* wrote the following: "Dear Tartan Army, You came for the World Cup, but gave us something more... For a week, you turned train stations into sing-alongs, Fenway into a football ground, and an ordinary June into something we'll be talking about for years... Boston has hosted championships, parades, and celebrations of every kind. But we've never hosted guests quite like you all... Thank you for the laughter, the bagpipes and the memories. The World Cup will move on. So will the songs, but we'll never forget the joy you brought to our city."

The president of the Boston Red Sox expressed a similar sentiment. "We wanted to take a moment to say thank you," he wrote. "What happened at Fenway Park on June 14 was something none of us will forget. We knew the Tartan Army was coming. We did not fully



understand what that meant until we saw it... Our fans embraced your supporters without reservation. Your supporters responded with exactly the generosity and good humour that have made the Tartan Army beloved everywhere in the world they travel... Please extend our deep gratitude to your staff, to manager Steve Clarke , and the full Scottish FA delegation, and above all to the Tartan Army itself. They treated our home like their own, and we are better for it."

The good feelings were clearly mutual. "Love you guys," responded Edinburgh resident Paul Morton. "Love this place. Brilliant. You've been the best hosts."

Official word was even issued by the Scottish National Team. "As we head for Miami," a team spokesman said, "we want to say a heartfelt thank you to the city & people of Boston. You've made us feel more than welcome in the time we've spent with you; you've made us feel part of your incredible city. Thank you for your generosity and your wonderful hospitality."¹ They put their money where their mouth is, too. Scottish fans have reportedly donated more than \$30,000 to local charities during their time in America.

While the Scottish team enjoyed some celebrated success on the field, they were eliminated from the group stage by a loss to Brazil, so most of the Tartan Army is headed home. But there is a greater victory here that will endure much longer: a victory of hospitality. The City of Boston and the Tartan Army have borne witness to the power of welcome, of mutual concern and care, and to use the word Paul Morton used: love.

And that is the very same message Jesus offers to his disciples in this passage from Matthew 10. As I said last Sunday, this is a final briefing before he sends them out as missionaries for the gospel. They will travel far and wide to bear witness to the power of love and peace and grace, but the world they will encounter can be unforgiving and cruel. As travelers in foreign towns, they will be vulnerable. But Christ reassures them with a promise that there are people out there who will receive them with kindness, house them, feed them, and help them. So, at its heart, this is a message about welcome.

But it is also a message about reward. "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,*" Jesus says, "*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.*" There are two sides of this equation, Jesus is saying: the travelers and the hosts. Both are expected to be gracious. Both are expected to be hospitable. And both can expect a reward.

But what kind of reward? Christ mentions both a "*prophet's reward*" and a "*reward of the righteous,*" but he does not explicitly either of those terms.

As we try to figure this out, a few interpretive notes are helpful. First, when we read the word "prophet" in this context, we should not think of ancient seers and prognosticators like Amos or Isaiah. In the early church, the word "prophet" was used interchangeably with the word "apostle" or "missionary." In this case, the prophet was any kind of traveling preacher or servant. In this sense, every follower of Christ -- everyone who goes out in Christian service -- is a prophet.

In the same way, the "righteous" applies to everyone who welcomes such a traveler with warmth, grace, and generosity. So again, there are two sides to this coin: there are travelers and hosts. And both are promised a reward. But again... what kind of reward?

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/tartan-army-new-england-world-cup-matches/>

Old school interpretations focus primarily on heaven. There is no promise that a disciple would be well-received in any town or country. In many, the reception would be hostile. The only guaranteed reward was deferred until death. I do not deny that is the biggest benefit that both a traveler and a host can expect. But I believe there is much more to the reward Christ is talking about in this passage – a reward that is not deferred until death, but can be received, embraced, and cherished immediately in the here and now. And that reward is, put simply, “communion.”

First and foremost, the reward is communion with God. “*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,*” Christ says, “*and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*” When we receive a brother or sister in Christ with compassion and generosity, we receive God into our lives, into our homes, into our hearts. As biblical scholar Alyce Mackenzie puts it, “Jesus is promising a reward for those who welcome prophets and righteous persons to the community, and for those who offer small kindnesses to the vulnerable in their midst. That reward is participation in the kingdom of God...”² The reward of the righteous is to be in communion with God – to actually feel the warmth and blessing of God’s presence in our lives.

But it is also a blessing to be in communion with others. And if we need any proof of that kind of reward, we need only look to the Tartan Army’s occupation of Boston. Whatever it was that happened there was clearly cherished both by the hosts and the visitors. Whatever it was that happened there warmed people’s hearts. Whatever it was that happened there, they did not want it to end. And whatever it was that happened there is not over. Whatever it was, both host and traveler are the better for it.

I think I have told you before, as a preacher I often find that there are times when a particular passage pops up in the normal lectionary rotation and I realize that the timing could not possibly be mere coincidence. Why would this passage come up this week, as we are still marveling at the overwhelming positivity of a Scottish soccer pilgrimage to America? It is really coincidence that this passage about hospitality and welcome would crop up when we are still basking in the glow of this undeniable example of the power of hospitality and welcome?

And do we really think it is just happenstance that, as we ponder these words of Jesus about travelers and hosts, Stephanie and I will be boarding a plane to Scotland this evening so that I can go and preach the gospel in a foreign land... and, just a few hours later, another soldier in the Tartan Army, Rev. Calum Stark of the Church of Scotland, will be traveling here to bring the Word of God to you? Could it be that the Spirit is moving here in the same way the Spirit has been moving in Boston?

As Henri Nouwen once wrote, the real blessing of hospitality is “*the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.*”³ The Tartan Army’s trip to Boston not only proved that such a blessing is within reach for all of us, but also that kindness is strong... that generosity is profitable... that cooperation can be joyful, and that communion with God and with other people carries its own reward.

So let’s embrace the opportunity we are being given. As both travelers and hosts, let’s embrace welcome’s true reward.

Because the Tartan Army arrives tomorrow. Amen.

² <https://www.patheos.com/progressive-christian/claim-your-reward-alyce-mckenzie-06-20-2014>

³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*