

Proper 8 (A) – June 26, 2011  
Saint Stephen's Church, Wimberley, TX  
Patrick Gahan  
Matthew 10:40-42  
*Welcome*

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He was not a welcome sight. But he kept knocking on the same doors for 25 years. "I had visions of a revolution," he said, but only his wife, who supported him financially all those years, shared that vision. He knocked on the doors of *Black & Decker*, *Eureka*, and *Kirby*. After five years, five years (!), he was given two minutes at *Hamilton Beach*. His idea was not welcome. His final visit was with *Electrolux*. They said "a vacuum cleaner without a bag would not sell."

So, he decided if there was going to be a revolutionary vacuum cleaner without a bag, he would have to manufacture and market it himself. In just 18 months, it was the best-selling vacuum in the world. The guest who was not welcome was, of course, James Dyson...who by 2002 – just nine years after he started his company – was a billionaire.<sup>1</sup>

Why was Mr. Dyson not welcome by all those supposedly cutting-edge companies? Well, I hate to get you *sucked-up* in this affair, but here goes: First, those companies' schedules were too busy to meet with Dyson. Their schedules were just too packed to spend even a half hour with him. It takes a lot of time, energy, and resources to keep things the way they are! *Hamilton-Beach* is a case in point. Dyson was no slob. He had at least one other successful invention in commercial production. Nevertheless, after waiting for an appointment five entire years, Dyson was welcomed into the corporate marketing board room for two whole minutes. Adding fuel to the fire, Dyson laments that just before he went in, his escort sternly warned him that he could not use the word "suck". Can you imagine making a riveting, two-minute presentation about a vacuum cleaner and not speaking of its ability to "suck" dirt out of the carpet? The corporate officers seem to put up one barrier after another to protect their overflowing dockets.

The second obstacle Dyson experienced at the hands of these big-time manufacturing companies was their resistance to change. They knew if they welcomed this upstart with his one revolutionary idea about vacuum cleaners they might have to change course in any number of ways. Better just to *bag* the idea at the gate, said *Electrolux*, and the others followed...at a great cost to themselves and their stockholders.

Is it not illuminating how we sacrifice long-term vision for short term gain? On Saturday afternoon, I was visiting a lady in our parish that is bedridden and dying of liver cancer. Propped up on her pillows, she declared to me, "We must cast our eyes on a future vision of ourselves, while keeping our feet solidly fixed in the present." We should think about my friend's wisdom for a moment. Yes, we should live fully in the present, but welcome the prospect of a more glorious future and thereby risk stepping out toward it.

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<sup>1</sup> "My Favorite Mistake: James Dyson on His 5,000 missteps...", *Newsweek*: June 6, 2011, 64.

Jesus knows all about the high cost of welcome. To welcome his revolution into our lives is *risky business*, to say the least. In an attempt to shore up his disciples before he sends them out on their first missionary trip without him, Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (**MT 10:40**). Wait just a minute. That’s a whole lot of welcome. So, if we crack open the door to our lives for a Christian brother or a sister, then Jesus and the Father slip through as well? Anyone ever tell them that *three’s a crowd*? Don’t they know that our lives are already full?

Our lives are full. There is no doubting that. Every month I call people I have not seen at worship or who have dropped out of Bible study or no longer serve in our outreach ministries. They say the same thing every time: “We’re just busy.” They are, and I honor that state of affairs – with two working parents, extended family commitments, household chores, service organizations and neighborhood associations, and not to mention soccer – young families are maxed-out. That’s not all, however. When I call our retired folks, the answer is pretty much the same: “Pat, I never knew retirement could be so full.”

At these times, I often think of the finest athlete I ever coached. His name was Marty. He was the son of an affluent African-American physician and was surrounded by older brothers who were exceptional scholars and athletes. He was the quarterback on our conference-winning football team, the point guard for our basketball team, but his mainstay was soccer. Not only did he represent our school as an all-state contender, but he played on a select team that played all over the U.S. and in Mexico. Marty’s schedule was full. But in Holy Week of 1992, he came to me to say that he had dropped out of the select team. I was stunned. When I asked why he did so, Marty said, “I am not spending another Easter away from home.” That’s pretty big decision for a 17 year-old boy – who, by the way, ended up at Dartmouth. Are we too full to receive Easter in our lives, to welcome the resurrected one? Then we are too full. Remember this truth: Busy-ness is a narcotic. Like any other potent drug, it keeps anything else from getting in – even God!

But we are not just too full. We are running scared. If we welcome Jesus and his revolution into our lives, won’t we have to change? As a matter of fact, yes. Jesus tells his disciples, “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward...” (**MT 10:41**). Did he say a “prophet’s reward?” Last time I checked in the Bible most all the prophets from Samuel to John-the-Baptist were either scourged, exiled, stoned, shunned, ridiculed, or had their head cut off all because of their radical ideas about God. Why would we risk welcoming any of that?

If we want to live, we had better put out that welcome mat. Let me explain. My friend in prison, Bill, wrote me this week about a new man in his Christian fellowship named “Brad” (not his real name). Brad experienced the worst thing imaginable for a parent. He was cheerfully making his drive home from work late one afternoon to find an EMS vehicle, a fire truck, and a police cruiser in front of his house. Beside the EMS vehicle was a large gurney with a tiny lump that

was completely covered. Beside the gurney was the remnant of her red, white, and chrome tricycle mangled into a ball of scrap metal. Brad's daughter was happily riding her little tricycle when she was struck by a motorist.

To fend off the pain, Brad was *sucked* into a black vortex of drugs, alcohol, and two psychiatric hospitals – anything to block the recurring scenes running through his head of his blanketed child on an EMS gurney and the mangled red and white tricycle on the side of the road. Brad's relentless flight from the pain, eventually landed him in prison – more than one, actually. And just recently he ended up in Bill's "tank" – his unit.

The other day, Brad just happened to be sitting at the table where Bill's little Christian fellowship meets. Not knowing what else to do, Bill and the other guys asked Brad if he wanted to join them in prayer. He said a timid yes, and with that he welcomed these Christian brothers and Christ himself into his life. Make no mistake; this is risky business for Brad. No doubt he has carved himself out a place adorned with tragic memories, anger, regret, revenge, and righteous anger. The only problem is that you can't really live that way. You only exist. If we take the chance and welcome Christ, he will change things – O will he ever! Those deadly wrecks in our lives – every one of them – will be transformed by the power of Jesus' resurrection.

You see, we are all like Brad in a way. We have a hole inside us, and all sorts of things are vying to fill it – more busy-ness, more of the same old stuff that has never worked for us, or more sensations to take our mind off of our condition. We have to decide what we will welcome within us. Will it be the Lord or just one more thing that *sucks* the life out of us? The oft stated law of physics is certainly true: "Nature abhors a vacuum."