

August 30, 2026

Loving Beyond Boundaries

By Pr. Beate Chun

There Is Room for You Here

Grace to you and peace
from the one who is
and the one who was
and the one who is to come.

I want to begin this morning
by telling you something someone said
about you.

A couple who has been visiting us
over the past few weeks
recently decided that St. Matthew's
is not quite the right church for them.

Their faith does not really align
with some of the teachings of our church,
and that is perfectly okay.

But before they moved on,
they sent me a note about their experience here.

And this is what they said:

“Everyone we met
was warm and genuinely hospitable.

The liturgy was reverent,
and the German service meant more to us
than we can easily say.

If this were about experience,
we would already be members.”

I want you to hear that.

**Everyone we met was warm
and genuinely hospitable.**

That is something to be proud of.

Because Sunday after Sunday,
I see you doing exactly that.

Someone brings refreshments and sets them up.

Someone notices a visitor
and introduces themselves.

Someone makes room at a table.

Someone takes the time to learn a name.

These may seem like small things,
but they are not small.

They are the way a congregation says:

“You are welcome here.

There is room for you here.”

And I picture the Apostle Paul smiling
at all of this.

Because what we are practicing here at St. Matthew’s
is very much in the spirit of what Paul is talking about
in the twelfth chapter of his letter to the Romans.

We have been traveling through Romans all summer,
and we have finally arrived at chapter 12.

And something changes here.

After eleven chapters in which Paul has been talking
about God’s grace,
about Christ,
about faith and new life,
he turns to a very practical question:

So what does all of this look like
when we actually live together?

What does all of this look like
when we come together in worship
and fellowship?

What does all of this look like
when we live out our faith
day to day,
as individuals,
as families,
and as a faith community?

And what follows is another one
of those heart-stirring passages
that has made the letter to the Romans
such a gift to churches and believers
for thousands of years.

Here in chapter 12,
Paul gives us a compelling description
of a life shaped by grace.
He names traits such as
genuine love,
patience,
generosity,
compassion,
hospitality,
blessing those who persecute us,
rejoicing with those who rejoice,
and weeping with those who weep.

And right in the middle of all of this,
there is one little phrase
that caught my attention this week.

Paul says:
“Pursue the love of strangers.”

“Pursue the love of strangers.”
Most of our English Bibles translate this as,
“Practice hospitality.”
And that is a beautiful translation.
But this week I found myself wondering
if we have made Paul's words
a little more comfortable than they actually are.
Because Paul uses the word for “stranger”
and pairs it with a word that means “pursue.”
Not simply: “Be hospitable.”
But: “Pursue the love of strangers.”
And suddenly this becomes much more demanding.

Pursue the love of strangers!

What does that even mean?

What does it mean
not merely to welcome strangers
who come to us,
but to pursue the love of strangers?

You already know what hospitality looks like,
because I see you practicing it
week after week.

But what Paul asks of us
right here in Romans 12
is a much more demanding task.

Paul isn't satisfied with the kind of hospitality
that waits for strangers to walk through our doors.

Paul wants us to go a step further
and actively practice stranger-love
which is more than offering hospitality.

Hospitality says:

There is room for you here.

Stranger-love says:

I will go looking for you.

So let's unpack this a little bit.

What does this stranger-love look like?

Strangers come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.

A stranger might be someone fascinating.

A stranger might be someone
who makes us uncomfortable.

A stranger might be someone
whose life is so different from ours
that we don't quite know how to enter their world.

As children we are often warned
not to talk to strangers.

As adults we might feel uncomfortable
talking to strangers.

What is there to talk about?

What if my approach is
unwelcome
or annoying to the stranger?

And why would I want to
talk to a stranger in the first place?

In other words,
our first instinct is often
to stay with what is familiar.

We know the people we know.
We understand the world we understand.

And there is a certain safety in that.

There are very good reasons to stay
behind closed doors.

Fear tells us to stay with people we know.
Anxiety tells us to protect what we have.
Uncertainty tells us not to take the first step
toward someone we don't know.

And yet, from the very beginning,
the gospel has been pushing God's people
through those closed doors.

Think about the disciples after Easter.
They had very good reasons to be afraid.
They had seen what had happened to Jesus.
They knew that following him had a cost.

And then the risen Christ comes to them
and sends them out.

And ever since Easter,
the risen Christ has stepped
through closed doors
and said: Go!

Go!

Go. Don't stay behind closed doors.
Don't stay only with the people you know.
Don't wait for the stranger to come to you.
Go.

The gospel has always pushed God's people
beyond closed doors.
The resurrection doesn't simply give us comfort.
It sends us outward.

But Jesus does not simply send us out
and then leave us on our own.

“Remember,” he says,
“I am with you always,
to the end of the age.”

Go—
and I will be with you, wherever you go,
I will never leave you
or abandon you.
And the Spirit will guide you.

So the answer to our fear
is not simply:
“Don’t be afraid.”
The answer is this:
“You will not be alone.
Not ever.”
So go.

And here I want to clarify one thing.
We don’t go out looking for “strangers”
so that we can convert them into members.
We go out because God is already present there.
And when we cross the boundary between
“us” and “them,”
we may discover that the stranger
was never quite as strange
as we imagined.

Where Might We Meet Them?

And so, over the last few months,
I have been asking myself:
What should I do?

Should I just sit around in coffee shops
hoping to get into conversation
with strangers?

That does not seem like
a very effective approach.

Then, after thinking about it some more,
here is something that I have decided to try.

Not far from us,
just around the corner,
on 16th and Valencia,
is the Columbia Park Clubhouse
of the Boys & Girls Club of San Francisco.

Perhaps you have heard of them,
or even been part of their activities.

They offer great after-school activities
and homework help for kids,
and they have an amazing volunteer program.

And so I have decided
to go and volunteer there.

I have just started my volunteer orientation
this week,
and any day now
I will begin the actual volunteer work.

My goal is simply to be around
the kids who live in our neighborhood.

You know how much I love kids,
so this will be right down my alley.
And then I will watch.
And listen.
And I hope to learn a little more
about what life is like for them.

Over time, I hope to get to know
some of the staff as well
and learn from them
what it is like to serve
the families in this neighborhood.

In particular,
I am eager to learn how we,
as a congregation,
might fit into all of this.

This will initially be mostly a journey
of listening and watching
and paying attention.

And maybe this is what pursuing
the love of strangers looks like.
Not having all the answers.
Not arriving with a plan.
Not knowing exactly what will happen.
Just being willing to step outside the familiar,
to pay attention,
to listen,
and to let the Spirit
teach us where to go next.

Because grace has already found us.
We don't have to manufacture anything.
We don't have to save anyone.
We don't even have to know what comes next.
We simply have to be willing to follow.
To pursue the love of strangers.

And perhaps, as we do,
we will discover that the strangers
we thought we were going out to find
have been waiting all along
to become our neighbors.

Let us pray:

O God,

you have called us
to ventures whose ending we cannot see,

along paths we have not yet traveled,
through places we do not yet know.

Give us faith
to go out with good courage,

not knowing exactly where we are going,
but trusting that your hand is leading us,

your Spirit is guiding us,
and your love is holding us.

Give us courage
to step beyond what is familiar,

to cross the boundaries that divide us,

to pursue the love of strangers,

and to discover in them
the neighbors you have given us.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Sermon for Sunday, August 30, 2026 - Pentecost 14

Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco

The 13th in a series of Sermons on the Letter to the Romans.

Text: [Romans 12:9-21 NRSVue - Marks of the True Christian - Let love - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Romans 12:9-21 | Strangers | Hospitality | Community | Courage