

Our Happy Place (5) - Welcome Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1) We spent our time yesterday talking through the 5th new core value for KW, which reads, "Welcome – 'All Y'all are Welcome. All Y'all Means All Y'all.' - Because we love God, we show Christian hospitality and invite others into community and spiritual growth with us. We love each and every person as a child of God."

2) We started by exploring the importance of welcome in the letter to the Romans, first looking at the 2nd half of Rom. 12.13, "...Pursue hospitality to strangers." When you unpack those Greek words, we could understand that to mean "seek or take the initiative to show family or friendship love to strangers."

3) Next, we dove into Rom. 14.1, which tells to bring near to ourselves or even "add to" ourselves those with whom we have serious, even seemingly-intractable, differences (in the original context of the passage, this would have been Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, and the seismic religious differences between them).

4) The last passage in Romans was Rom. 15.7, which simply calls us to exceedingly-high standard of welcoming others "as Christ has welcomed you." (In fact, we used this phrase as our focal point for Communion yesterday.)

5) The PCUSA calls what the apostle Paul is describing in Romans "radical welcome." In the 8 Habits of Evangelism curriculum, we find this descriptive quote: "Radical welcome frees all of us to let go of the mindset of us vs. them. Rather, no one is the other for all are part of the same one body of Christ, within which each part is essential. The fear of the unknown is replaced by the excitement of embrace and what could be. This virtue is God's call to Christians to be breach menders, a safe haven, and the reflection of our welcoming God in the world."

6) The spiritual practice or habit (also known as a spiritual discipline) of welcome/hospitality has marked Christianity over its 2000 years. Rev. Dr. C. Randy Schrock says that there are at least four attitudes or commitments required to be welcoming in a truly Christian kind of way: a) Gentle Persistence (we give people time and space because they may be wary initially), b) Unconditional Acceptance (we welcome people as they are and on their terms, not as our "project"), c) Mutual Suffering (in welcoming, we will be affected deeply by the wounds others carry), and d) Mutual Transformation (both parties, the welcomer and the welcomed, will be deeply and equally changed).



7) The United Methodist Church recently published a list of some of the ways churches aren't welcoming, some of which are easy to overlook: a) Inadequate or nonexistent signage because long-timers know where everything is, for example classroom signage, b) No designated visitor parking spaces, and if they're there, they're not the best spots or are taken by long-time attenders, c) The church entrance is poorly marked or visually-unappealing, d) Asking a visitor to move from your usual spot or pew in the sanctuary, e) Lots of announcements that require insider knowledge of the church, f) Little to no follow up with a guest who would like to be contacted; or similarly, no clear plan to walk alongside guests week by week as they get to know your church and see if it's right for them, and g) No available space in existing classes or small groups for newcomers because they're at 100% full of long-timers at the church.

8) A final quote to summarize the biblical and Christian concept of radical welcome, this from Rev. Nanette Sawyer (a PCUSA minister in Chicago), in her book *Hospitality – The Sacred Art*: "We may often think of hospitality as merely being polite or accommodating to guests, but our ancient predecessors in the faith understood the profound potential of radical welcome to transform our own lives...Spiritual hospitality flows from three primary traits - receptivity, reverence, and generosity. Becoming receptive is to prepare ourselves to be able to invite others into our lives and community, being reverent is to honor others as fully human and beloved children of God, and being generous is to let care in all its forms flow freely from ourselves to others."

A Prayer for the Week

We used this to close out our service yesterday, we've just changed the pronouns below from plural to singular so you can use it throughout the week:

Adapted from Rev. Naomi King (The Wonderment):

My hospitable and welcoming God, teach me to open my shuttered heart and overcrowded life so that I, who have been claimed by Your love, will share it more readily with others.

It is so easy to live absent in the world, cloistered away in my own needs and pursuits. So help me make wide circles of welcome, big enough for friends and strangers alike. In these circles, may all share our stories and experience of wonder and abundance of real community. May these circles be held together by the attitudes and actions we see on display in Jesus of Nazareth: forbearance, forgiveness, gratitude, joy, grace, and great, unquenchable love.

And when I encounter someone wandering alone through life, may I take the initiative to invite them into my circle of welcome, because in Christ's Kingdom no one is lost, no one is abandoned, and all are sought in earnest, amen.

Explore More This Week

1) Intrigued by this idea of impossibly-different people welcoming one another and bringing one another close? Read through all of Romans 14 and the early part of Romans 15 this week: [Rom 14.1-15.13 NRSVUE](#)

2) For those who weren't at the 8:30 or larger 11:00 Sunday School gatherings, here's the TED talk we watched together on "hostmanship - the art of making people feel welcome": [TEDxMaastricht - Jan Gunnarsson - "Hostmanship: the art of making people feel welcome"](#)

3) If you're TED talk fan, here's another one on how to change the world one day at a time through hospitality: [A Hospitality Mindset: Changing the World, One Day at a Time | Barbara Lang | TEDxCornellU](#)

4) From a respected expert on spiritual formation and practice, welcoming means not being selective: [Welcoming the Stranger - Jan Johnson](#)

5) And here's the full lesson referenced during the sermon on "radical welcome" from a PCUSA curriculum entitled "8 Habits of Evangelism" (which make a nifty Sunday School for KW someday)...by the way, you can download the lesson for free if you scroll down, which means you could work through it in your own devotional life this week or with your class/small group): [RADICAL WELCOME | 8 Habits](#)