



'Worship at home' Sunday July 2nd 2023



We come to worship God,
who we find in the holy spaces
and the ordinary places of our lives.

Opening

Jesus said:

"Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me;
and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."
We gather in the presence of the God
who welcomes us with open arms,
loves us unconditionally,
and who bids us do the same to one another.

- adapted from <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>

Spending time with others is important for our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, and social studies have consistently shown strong links between our social connections and our wellbeing. Even introverts need others in their lives! However, many of us also know the experience of feeling lonely even in the midst of a group of friends.

**Reflect on a time when you
have felt excluded,
perhaps unintentionally.**

**Reflect on a time when you may
have felt especially welcome,
perhaps unexpectedly.**



'Welcome' is an invitation into a place or a community where we might then find a sense of belonging and identity.

***Hospitality - the friendly and generous reception
of guests, visitors, or strangers.***

- Oxford Dictionary

There is a long Jewish and Christian tradition of showing welcome and hospitality. The call to welcome the stranger is found in the Hebrew Law and was a part of the measure of a community's faithfulness to God. When a traveller came to town, they waited by the well, and it was expected that the community would welcome the visitor, and offer food, water and shelter, opportunity to wash, and even protection. This was the same whether they were friend or stranger. Such hospitality was central to the Hebrew identity, and to their understanding of the character of God. Not to offer hospitality was seen as dishonourable. A messenger or servant was to be treated with the same hospitality as the person who sent them, welcomed not just as an individual, but as part of the family or community from which they came.

True hospitality is not about how friendly and welcoming we find our community, but how friendly and welcoming others find it.

Matthew 10:40-42

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward. And whoever welcomes a good man

because he is good, will share in his reward. You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward." Good News Bible

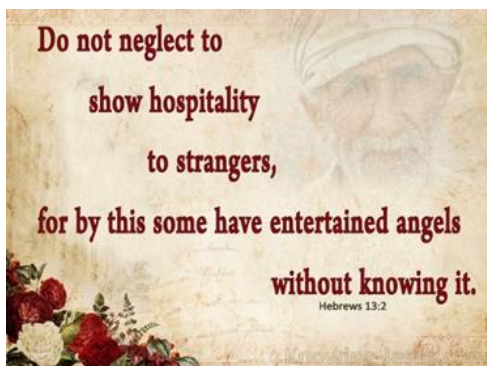
This teaching from Matthew's gospel encourages us to welcome others, even if that comes at a cost. For Matthew's community, offering hospitality to a Christian could bring persecution and even death. Welcoming those in need, or those outside our community, or those who we may not feel we understand, might be risky.

True hospitality is not about welcoming friends into a comfortable space, but accepting strangers as they are.

Welcoming others is more than simply saying hello and asking them to stay for morning tea. Welcoming others means inviting them into relationship, getting to know them, making a safe space where they can feel accepted and loved, where we can all feel accepted and loved, so that we then experience together more fully the love and acceptance and grace of God. We are called to welcome all, no matter what age, culture or tradition they are from, even if they speak or act or pray or worship or think differently from us. This might put us out in some way, however it could also be life-changing, for each of us.

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."

- Henri J.M. Nouwen: Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life



A small act of welcome or kindness can have a significant impact. Even a cup of cold water, a listening ear, a lift to an appointment, or a small donation to a foodbank can have life-changing consequences.

In what ways might you show welcome and kindness to another this week?

