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**Welcome**  
**Matthew 10:40-42**

<sup>40</sup> “Whoever welcomes you welcomes **me**, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> 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, <sup>42</sup> and 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.”

Remember these famous words?

*"Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!"  
cries she With silent lips.  
"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"  
– Emma Lazarus, 1883*

Those are the words of *New Colossus*, a poem by Emma Lazarus, inscribed on our own **Statue of Liberty**—**words of WELCOME**.

Words that have literally welcomed immigrants to this country since 1886.

***How are we doing with welcoming others?***

When was the last time you welcomed someone?

What was that like? Easy? Difficult?

If it was difficult, why is that?

Was it someone different? Strange? Annoying?

Jesus says that when we welcome others, *we are actually welcoming Him.*

It's really as simple as that.

And if we do something as small as giving *a cup of cold water*, we will be rewarded, because we are giving that cup of cold water—*to Him.*

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25,

Jesus says that we will all be separated at the end of days, like sheep and goats, with those who cared for the least of these being rewarded because what we do *for the least of these*, *we are doing for Jesus himself.*

Welcoming people sounds like a no-brainer as Christians.

*But it's easier said than done, isn't it?*

Welcoming others is one thing when they are like-minded,

When they look and act and sound like us....when they agree with us.

But what about welcoming those who are....different?

William Goettler tells a story about his colleague in seminary who traveled around Ireland researching her book, *The Real Peace Process.*

One day she visited a beautiful *Presbyterian church in Northern Ireland*, and was warmly greeted at the door by two women, ushers who were asking her lots of polite questions, starting with her *name.*

Pastor Garrigan soon realized they were screening people at the door.

Hearing their names, the ushers would determine who was allowed to enter the sanctuary.

Those with *Protestant names* were warmly welcomed and shown to a seat.

Those with *Catholic names*—like Maria, Catherine, or Patrick—

were told they were surely in the wrong church and sent on their way.

When William asked her what year this happened,

Garrigan said it was still the practice, to this day.

William Goettler, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A. Vol. 3, pg. 188.

We hear and story like that we think—well, that could never be us, right?

We are truly welcoming—just like our sign on Rt. 34 says “*All Are Welcome*”.

But is *EVERYONE truly welcome?*

Churches are often the most segregated hours of the week,  
and many churches have an unwritten dress code,  
or expectation of wealth, education, politics, identity or background.

I know I was drawn to *FPC Matawan for it's diversity*,  
Which is striking compared to Owasso, Oklahoma!  
But we can always do better, right?  
*Who do we NOT welcome?*

Of course our ideas about welcome are *so affected by the world around us*.  
We live in a political climate that is *antithetical* to welcome.  
Every day we hear more rhetoric about keeping immigrants out,  
or outing trans youth, or denying basic rights to this group or that one.  
We don't hear much about welcome.

Thank God for Jesus!  
*Thank God our calling is different.*  
And Jesus says whenever we welcome anyone, *we are welcoming Him.*

In the Ancient Near Eastern world of the Bible, *hospitality was golden*.  
It was *expected* that weary travelers would be able to find someone  
to provide food and lodging for them, to complete strangers!  
Which is why the story of no room at the inn for Joseph and Mary  
is such a striking story.  
Because people in that day knew what it was to be in need,  
so they knew how important it was to help others in need.

This is why Jesus could preach parables and say things like:  
*If a friend comes to your door at night and you open it to give them bread,*  
*how much more will your Father in heaven care for you.*  
His audience knew *that basic hospitality was expected.*

Today we do a lot to make our homes more comfy and inviting,  
but usually the improvements are for us,  
not to provide lodging or food to strangers, or missionaries,  
or people who are struggling.  
Our ideas of hospitality are centered around our friends and family,  
not the world at large.

And yet *our sacred book* contains story after story about welcome and hospitality, about *God showing up when we welcome others*.

When three strangers showed up at the home of Abraham and Sarah in *Genesis 18*, they ended up entertaining angels, completely unaware.

The code of conduct for God's people in *Leviticus 19:33-34* says:  
 'When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress them.  
 They shall be *as a citizen* among you,  
 you shall *love the alien as yourself*,  
 for you were *aliens* in the land of Egypt, and I am your God'.

In *Luke 24*, Cleopas and his friend start walking after hearing of the resurrection, dejected because they cannot believe the story of the women at the empty tomb. After the long walk to Emmaus, they welcome the stranger who had walked beside them into their home, and as they broke bread together their eyes were opened, and they realized it had been Jesus all along!

*Paul's missionary journeys* relied on the welcome of others, and the Book of Acts contains numerous stories about him being welcomed into the homes of men, and women of the church!

It reminds me of my *Grandma Morene*.  
 She was a woman of incredible hospitality.  
 I love that I have her old table,  
 Where she always had food in the kitchen,  
 so she could feed absolutely anyone who came to her door—  
 whether they be selling something  
 (I remember being there as a kid with a vacuum salesman who was thrilled to be eating pie),  
 or just traveling through the area,  
 or doing some day work there on the farm.

She was especially thoughtful of men working outside in the heat of the day, and offering them lemonade or iced tea, and a spread of food—a whole meal, or a beautiful array of sweet treats.  
 If you came to Morene's house, you would never leave hungry.  
 Or without good conversation, around that big dining room table—which sat in the middle of her well-used kitchen.

I thought of farm workers and *a tall glass of iced water*,  
 when I read this passage about offering a cup of cold water.  
 A cup of cold water *seems like a very small thing, insignificant thing*.  
 But according to Jesus, it's NOT small.  
 It's *transformative*.  
 We think it sounds crazy, but *one cup of cold water can change the world!*

It's a little like the *starfish story*.  
*"One day a man was walking along the beach, when he noticed a boy picking up starfish and throwing them into the ocean.  
 Approaching the boy, he asked, "Excuse me, but what are you doing?"  
 The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean.  
 The sun is rising and tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."  
 The man laughed and said, "But there's too many starfish on this beach.  
 You can't possibly make a difference!"  
 After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the ocean. Then, turning to the man, he said, "  
**'I made a difference to THAT one.'***  
 "The Starfish Story" originally written by Loren Eiseley.

Sometimes it's not a cup of cold water that's needed,  
 sometimes it's just a *listening EAR*.  
 Have you ever experienced the power of JUST listening to a friend in need?  
 Not giving any advice, or opinion, or giving anything at all,  
 but a listening ear and affirmation that you hear them?  
 It's powerful isn't it?

Sometimes *a HUG* is what's needed most.  
 I have a pastor friend who says you need at least one hug a day,  
 and if you can't get a hug from someone else,  
 you should wrap yourself up in a blanket to give yourself a hug!  
 Some hugging went away during Covid,  
 but thankfully some of it is coming back.  
 Because people often need a hug—that human connection and touch.

I have a T-shirt that says **FREE MOM HUGS**. Free Mom Hugs is an organization founded by Sara Cunningham, a Christian mom in Oklahoma with a gay son. Her organization empowers parents especially to celebrate the LGBT community through visibility, education, and conversation.

On Saturday, June 20, 2015, Sara wore a homemade button with the words “**Free Mom Hugs**” to the Oklahoma City Pride Festival. She offered hugs to anyone who made eye contact. The first hug Sara gave was to a beautiful girl who whispered, “It’s been four years since I got a hug from my mom because I came out to her.” Sara embraced her and hundreds more that day, and many shared similar stories with every embrace. That day Free Mom Hugs — a nationwide movement of love, visibility and acceptance— was born.

***How do YOU welcome others?  
How do WE?***

I think we never know what one small act of welcome can do for someone else. When it comes to being disciples, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking that we are only making a difference if we do something ***really BIG***.

We think that only the Billy Grahams or Eugene Petersons of the world are changing lives, not us.  
***But we ARE changing lives,***  
For when we welcome others, we are welcoming Jesus Christ.

In fact, we are ***REPRESENTING Jesus*** when we welcome others— because Jesus was a man of hospitality. His arms were open for all. His touch was meant for anyone who was hurting.

This is one reason I love ***The Chosen*** series on Amazon Prime— a reenactment of the life of Jesus. Because you see this on the screen—this love of Jesus in his ministry.

The whole point of being a disciple is ***TO BE LIKE JESUS***. It’s following the old slogan— ***WWJD—What Would Jesus Do?*** That’s an important question to answer— on a daily, sometimes hourly basis. What ***WOULD*** Jesus do? How ***would Jesus welcome*** this person, or that group? And ***how have we been welcomed by Jesus,*** into the family of God?

When we go out into the world,  
 We need to ask ourselves, ***are we representing the Jesus we preach and teach?***  
 Are we representing the Jesus we say we follow?  
 The Jesus who has changed our lives?

I love what Pastor Scott Hoezee says:

*There needs to be a **radical CONSISTENCY** between the **Jesus you proclaim and yourself**. And perhaps these days it is well that we recall this. Christians who are offensive in the loud, mean-spirited, in-your-face way by which some have tried to fight culture wars in recent decades have **not served the cause of Jesus very well**.*

*Who wants to believe the gospel's content  
 if the ones proclaiming that gospel are the very folks  
 many people most want to **avoid** in life?!*  
*If so and so is such an **uncouth, ungrateful, loud-mouthed fellow** that no one  
 would even want to have him over for dinner, then what difference does it make if  
 [he] can reel off the Beatitudes from memory?*  
***Few people will ever be willing to receive Jesus' presence** into their lives  
 if they are not willing to receive **those who represent** that same Jesus.*  
 Scott Hoezee, <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2020-06-22/matthew-1040-42-2/>

What about us?

***How do we represent Jesus?***

Are we **BEING Jesus**--as individuals, and as a church—  
 And are we welcoming others,  
 because that's exactly what Jesus would do.

Does this mean there is **only one way to BE Jesus?**

No. Think about it this way.

If I ask 10 of you to imitate me,  
 there are going to be 10 different interpretations of Pastor Natalie.

Being a Christian doesn't make us like the Borg on Star Trek—  
 we don't all start talking, thinking, and acting the same way.  
 Instead, we share Jesus Christ through our individual gifts---  
 we share Jesus, but from our own unique vantage-point.  
 We are all like **windows into the person of Jesus Christ**.

In Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* he talks about the *Power of the Few*—the social connectors that enable bigger networks.  
In other words, ***just a few people can change the world!***

We see this in the *Book of Acts*, where seemingly '*minor*' characters make lots of bigger miracles and ministry happen.  
This is even true in the *Gospels*—look at those insignificant women at the empty tomb—they are the first to preach the good News!  
Where would we be without them?

We can ***each make a difference*** by welcoming someone else.  
By reaching out to someone else.  
We may not be able to change the world at once,  
but we can ***change a life*** by what we do—  
and that's the ***first step*** in changing the world!

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today:  
We can make a difference by welcoming someone else.  
So let's do just that.  
And for the gift of welcome, all God's people can say, Amen!