

Call to worship

Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'

Come now to worship, for you are welcome!

Praise: Let us build a house

Let us build a house where love can dwell

and all can safely live,

a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

rock of faith and vault of grace;

here the love of Christ shall end divisions.

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,

and words are strong and true,

where all God's children dare to seek

to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

and as symbol of God's grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found

in water, wine and wheat:

a banquet hall on holy ground

where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,

is revealed in time and space;

as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach

beyond the wood and stone

to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,

and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger

bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger.

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,

their songs and visions heard

and loved and treasured, taught and claimed

as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,

prayers of faith and songs of grace,

let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

All age slot

All around the world people greet each other in different ways. Here are a few to look up and to try out:

- Tibetan monks stick their tongues out to greet people.
- In Japan people bow.
- In Oman, men greet each other by pressing their noses together.
- The traditional Maori greeting in New Zealand is to press foreheads together and look into each other's eyes.
- In Malaysia you would stretch out your hand and touch the other person's fingertips, and then bring your hands to your heart as a sign that your greeting is heartfelt.
- In Kenya you will be in for a treat when tribal warriors perform a magnificent jumping dance!

'to welcome' means 'to be pleased about and encourage or support something or someone'. God calls us to be a welcoming community offering others a sense of belonging and hope. As we should be recognised as true followers by our actions towards others.

See how quickly you can recognise these characters as they are slowly revealed?

Video: Can you recognize these characters?

Praise: Everybody's welcome

Prayer

God of each and every generation,
we come to this place to worship you.

With our words, we will proclaim your faithfulness.

With our music, we will sing of your steadfast love. In our listening and praying,
with our neighbours beside and around us,
we will worship you with the very best that we can offer.

We confess that we have not always given of our best,
we have not always lived as people with faith,
welcoming the stranger;
and there have been times when we have given way to sin,
and not always shown kindness to our neighbours.

Hold us in your love,
as we make our confession in the silence...

With a love we cannot imagine,
and mercy that never fails to forgive,
grant us your pardon, O God,
that we might live by your grace,
and your grace alone.

For the welcome we find here,

we thank you.

For the love you show us,

we thank you.

For the kindness we find in those who are faithful to you,

we thank you.

For your strength in times of weakness,

we thank you.

For hope when doubt overwhelms,

we thank you.

And for your love for one and all,

we thank you.

May your welcome become an invitation we extend to others.

May your love be a love we share with others.

And may we grow in faith, as you keep faith with us.

We ask this in Christ's name.

I am the stranger seeking a welcome.

I am the welcome who greets the stranger.

I am the one who recognises the prophet.

I am the prophet who speaks a word of truth.

I am the receiver of God's love and grace.

I am the one through whom God's love shines;

with God's grace, I am.

Amen.

Offering / prayer

Reading: Matthew 10:40 – 42

Sermon: A cup of cold water

Some things ought to be obvious, but apparently they're not. This is probably the reason we have government warning labels on everything. This is why on bottles of alcohol you will be told - consumption of large amounts of alcohol may impair judgment. If you take sleeping pills you will probably find a warning on the box which states - May cause drowsiness.

Like I said, some things ought to be obvious. We should be able to solve basic maths problems in an instant, and we should be able to find Wally in a Where's Wally cartoon easily.

Just like the words of Jesus in our Gospel reading; whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones . . . I mean isn't this blindingly obvious! Does Jesus really have to tell us to be kind to little children?

Sadly, the alarming statistics about child abuse in this country and all around the world would indicate that there are a large number of people who do indeed need to be warned and reminded about that.

And also, ordinary kindness and generosity to little children is only a part of what Jesus is getting at here. There is a much more complex meaning in these three short verses.

The text comes at the end of a sequence in Matthew's gospel in which Jesus has been preparing his disciples to go out into the world to preach the Kingdom. He is telling them how to respond to the variety of ways their efforts will be received.

When he says, "whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me", Jesus is drawing a line from the disciples through himself to the creator God. To welcome a disciple is the same as welcoming God into your home.

This is a twofold promise. On the one hand it reminds the disciples to be humble about the reception they receive, for that welcome is not for them, it is for God. On the other hand, it reminds them that they do not go out representing themselves and their own wisdom and power; they go out representing God.

We all need to remember this as we go about our business of being Christians, disciples of Jesus in the world. It is definitely not about me, and it's not about you, it's all about God.

Then in verse 41, Jesus drives the point home by reminding the disciples of the biblical stories of prophets and righteous people being received as a way of honouring God and serving God. And in verse 42, He makes one of his classic reversals, turning things upside down and inside out; taking our expectations and rearranging them.

Just as we've got used to the idea of honouring important people, like disciples and prophets as a way of honouring God, Jesus switches to talking about children: "...and whoever gives even a cup of water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple."

Now up until this point, the disciples were feeling pretty good, thinking about being connected to the prophets and Jesus, and even God. Then suddenly the tables are turned and they find themselves being compared to children.

The message of Jesus, the message of the Kingdom of God, the message that is the Gospel is a message of reversal, of upside down and sideways values, where those who are seen by the world to be on top are known to really be on the bottom, and those on the bottom are valued by God as the most important of all.

I will always remember the esteemed theologian and writer John Stott saying that the Christian faith was at its core – counter cultural. He was absolutely correct. Society will offer us a solution to living our lives, suggesting that focusing on me is the only way to succeed.

In these few verses Jesus subtly moves the disciples through a sequence that leads them away from thinking about how important they are, to thinking about how they can serve the least important people in the world in the name of Jesus.

Think about it – a little child can't work, a child has no wisdom or prestige or significance to share. In fact, to the ancient world, most children were nothing more than a nuisance, another mouth to feed, another brat under foot until they became old enough to work at the age of 5 or 6.

So, when Jesus bestows upon them the same value as disciples and prophets and righteous people, indeed, if you follow the logic of the text, the same value as himself and God; when Jesus does this he has done an incredibly radical and unheard of thing.

And it is just this sort of radical and unheard of thing to which we modern day disciples and sent ones, 21st century prophets and persons who aspire to be righteous, have been called. We have been called to go out in the name of Jesus Christ to share our stuff and God's love with those whom the world rejects and turns its back on.

We have been called to give radical hospitality to those who don't have what we have, and to people who keep failing in life and to those unable to work and take care of themselves.

We have been called to look at people not with our own eyes but with the eyes of Christ. We have been called to love the loveless, not with our cold and shrivelled hearts, but with the heart of Christ which overflows with love for all.

We have been called to care for others whether they deserve it or not; because none of us is disciplined and righteous and prophetic enough to deserve the love of God; it has been given to us as a gift, and we are called to give it to others free of charge and free of judgment.

The bottom line is that we have been called to the ministry of welcoming and receiving and giving and loving and the only question left is, "How will we answer that call?"

Praise: We will meet when the danger is over

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus, it's a shameful thing
when you've set invitations to all who will come and we stand at the door and turn people away it's
shameful how we find ways to justify, in Your Name,
the lines we draw between us,
the exclusions and suspicions,
the greeds and power-plays,
that harm the least,
and protect our special interests.

And so we pray:

Lift us above our pettiness and self-protection,
and use us as Your agents of justice and mercy;
May Your grace open our doors, stretch out our arms and turn our attention
to the excluded, rejected and neglected ones.
May Your wisdom teach our minds, open our hearts and challenge our apathy
to find solutions to the conflicts and self-created threats in our world.
May Your love release our energies, ignite our abilities and inspire our action
to heal those who carry the scars of abuse, war and disease,
to comfort those who grieve the loss of loved ones or opportunities,
to restore the ones who have failed or fallen,
to nurture the life that breaks out in every person and every part of our planet.

And make us heralds of Your kingdom
who extend Your invitation to all who will listen.
Amen.

When will it end, Lord? When will this nightmare be over? We're told things must get worse before they get better; that the death toll will rise and the number of those infected continue to climb, despite every measure being taken to prevent it. Yet we're promised also that, eventually, this disease will peak, and that we can then slowly start picking up the pieces of our lives again, rebuilding our economy, and hopefully returning to some semblance of normality. But will that happen, or will this virus prove more stubborn, more resistant, more difficult to eradicate than we imagine? We just don't know.

Give us patience to make whatever sacrifices are necessary, however long the duration. Give us fortitude and determination, strength and wisdom, to respond sensibly to whatever challenges we face. And help us to keep faith that, however interminable the tunnel may seem, we will finally see light at the end of it. Amen.

Sending our prayer:

Go in the name of Jesus
To follow the way of Jesus
To love with the love of Jesus
And be sustained by the peace of Jesus

Praise: I, the Lord of sea and sky
I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky,
I Have Heard My People Cry.
All Who Dwell In Dark And Sin,
My Hand Will Save.
I Who Made The Stars Of Night,

I Will Make Their Darkness Bright.
Who Will Bear My Light To Them?
Whom Shall I Send?

I, The Lord Of Snow And Rain,
I Have Borne My People's Pain.
I Have Wept For Love Of Them, They Turn Away.
I Will Break Their Hearts Of Stone,
Give Them Hearts For Love Alone.
I Will Speak My Word To Them
Whom Shall I Send?

I, The Lord Of Wind And Flame
I Will Tend The Poor And Lame.
I Will Set A Feast For Them,
My Hand Will Save
Finest Bread I Will Provide,
Till Their Hearts Be Satisfied.
I Will Give My Life To Them,
Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?
I Have Heard You Calling In The Night.
I Will Go Lord, If You Lead Me.
I Will Hold Your People In My Heart.