

### **Sermon – Trinity 3 – June 28th 2020 Yr A Rev Elaine Atack**

Over the past few weeks we have been hearing about Jesus 'sending out' his disciples and the trials they will inevitably face.

This week's Gospel reading is about what happens when they arrive and gives words of reassurance and hope.

In just a few short sentences of power and compassion – we are challenged to think more deeply about what is really meant by welcoming one another.

Now all over the world people greet each other in different ways which may seem very strange or even offensive to us. Eg the monks of Tibet stick their tongues out to greet people. In Japan people bow to each other – bowing lower and lower as they try to determine who has the higher status. 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 reach out your hand and touch the other person's fingertips, and then bring your hands to your heart as a sign that your welcome is heartfelt. And can you imagine this one – in Kenya tribal warriors perform a magnificent jumping dance. Could you imagine us doing that at the church door!

I wonder what welcome means to you? Technically it means "to be pleased about and encourage or support someone or something.

To be welcomed has a warmth and a comfort – even excitement. To feel you matter and are in a way wanted.

To feel unwelcome therefore is hurtful.

Think for a moment about how you like to be welcomed and how you welcome others: it may be a hug, shaking hands a pat on the back – all things which are not possible right now – but a display of vocal excitement, a huge smile of encouragement can be so infectious.

Welcome and hospitality had a strong cultural basis during the time of Jesus as witnessed by his many social encounters and meals with friends.

So he sends his disciples out telling them that whoever welcomes them welcomes him, and by extension his heavenly Father - because their character, actions and words should make it obvious that they belonged to him.

In fact - any of our interactions with others, in any situation, should in some way bring Jesus into the encounter.

The simple, basic acts of kindness we perform in genuine welcome of one another are all that God asks of us – and it makes so much difference!

We must look around us to see who is in need and then do something about it.

You see – real compassionate welcome means approaching each other through God.

God's hospitality teaches us that close, loving, enduring relationships are to be valued - along with distant, occasional and abrasive ones – as difficult as the latter may be.

If we live in this welcome with each other, we will find the rich rewards of discipleship found in God - and we can discover the reward that comes from the deep hospitality found in God's welcome of us.

But let's not get too smug about rewards either!

Although Jesus does talk of rewards in this passage – we should not offer compassionate welcome with the expectation that something will be returned to us.

The disciples may have thought “Well, we have sacrificed our personal comfort, material possessions and security to go on this mission – what’s in it for us?”

Jesus is clear with his disciples that any small acts of kindness or thoughtfulness brings overwhelming rewards – because doing God’s work is a reward in itself – by a deepening relationship with God and an experience of God’s love and spiritual gifts.

He is also clear that being his followers will be difficult at times and they will suffer persecution - because - sadly love is not always met with love.

Sometimes love is met with crucifixion – we are asked to love in the midst of hate – even in those times when it appears that hatred has won.

But we must remember that God’s grace continues to act in and through the most dreadful situations - and that crucifixion is followed by resurrection and hope.

The generosity that Jesus speaks of is, at one level, an ordinary human response to need.

The reference to the cup of cold water for a “little one” in our Gospel reading, reminds us that even an apparently small action can be a demonstration of great respect and love.

The overwhelming community response to the Coronavirus pandemic indicates that any ordinary gesture is never to be undervalued.

We are responsible for the way in which we interact with the people God sends to us – not just the prophets and righteous people who are mentioned in this passage.

Just as God became human in Jesus Christ, so now God comes to us through those who, in whatever way, bring us the truths of the kingdom of God.

We, too, need to keep open minds if we are to hear the truth.

We need to be alert to all kinds of possibilities and train ourselves out of our preconceptions and prejudices but train our hearts and minds to be perpetually curious and open to any lessons – whether that’s through someone’s words or actions.

God is constantly teaching us through every experience.

Yet, all kinds of things can prevent us from listening and learning.

Maybe it’s pride which gets in the way, or we are too busy, or stressed, or too important or, we are convinced that we know better.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can all think of examples in our own lives when we could have learnt lessons from other people from all walks of life.

Each in his or her own way was a prophet.

We need to be more ready to speak out God’s words rather than pandering to what we think people will want to hear, perhaps in order to gain popularity.

It’s so easy for charity to be forgotten and backs turned on those with whom we disagree – rather than cups of water held out to them.

So if we humble ourselves and have courage to offer that cup of cold water to a little one, and listen to what God’s kind of welcome is telling or showing us, life will be immensely richer for it – and that in itself is a “prophet’s reward”.