

## Reflection Genesis 22:1-14 & Matthew 10:40-42



This morning, I want to show you something, I've made this circle of people with paper. In the middle, this big yellow person with open arms is the risen Christ. And here, the different colored paper dolls holding hands are his disciples.

When you see this display, what kinds of words come to your mind? What is the first thing, or what is the first thought or first image that comes to your mind? Let's have a moment to think about it.

To me, this circle of paper dolls reminds me of friendship, belonging, community, intimacy, inclusion, participation, collaboration, and cooperation. And this risen Christ figure reminds me of welcoming, relationship, companionship, leadership, direction, and embracing.

I guess there might be lots of different thoughts and different images you could have or think of, and today I would like to talk about "welcoming" and my reflection is inspired by Rev. Geoff Wellington.

The bible passage today, Jesus says "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes the One who sent me"

Jesus' teaching and preaching were being welcomed and rejected by the religious leaders in His days. So, he challenged the disciples to welcome others, that is more than the hospitality we normally expect.

Now, I'm sure that all of you have experienced welcome and rejection at some point in your lives.

Back in 2003, it was about a year after I came to Australia. I've experienced a time, not being welcomed at a church.

One Sunday morning, Rena and I went to a local church near home to worship. When we entered the church, two people were welcoming us at the door and gave us the order of service and we introduced ourselves, that we were just visiting on the day and we lived close by.

Then after the worship, everyone moved to the hall for the morning tea and we were also offered some tea. At first, we didn't know where to sit. So, we looked around the hall and there was an empty table and chairs. So, we sat there and had our tea.

For about 15 minutes, while we were having tea at our table, no one came to say hello or came to talk to us, and we finished the tea and left the church.

I don't think it was a good experience at all. I felt that we were not welcomed.

Some of us in our society have also experienced this unwelcoming in some ways. Even though Australia is a country of migration, we tend to welcome some people but not everyone.

If you come on a boat, then you are not welcome. But, if you come on an airplane with lot of money, well that's okay. You are very welcome here.

Our society might look warm, full of light, welcoming and cheerful on the outside, but if you look deeper into it, it's not really like that.

There was an Indian restaurant on one of the busy streets, but that restaurant wasn't very crowded. Not many customers visited each day, each week. The owner was struggling financially due to low sales.

But every Tuesday around lunch time, a man in his 60s always came to have a meal there. And the curious owner asked the man, "There are many other restaurants on this street and why do you always come to our restaurant for lunch?"

And he smiled and said, “Well, I love your food, but I also love your welcoming and the hospitality. I feel like home here.” I think the customer, he felt welcomed by the family who owned the restaurant, who prepared the food for him and greeted him with their hearts at their restaurant.

I wonder when you have experienced welcome, how did it make you feel?

I wonder How does it feel not to be welcomed?

Our text today reminds us that to welcome the other is to welcome God into our lives. It reminds me of many different stories in the bible such as; stories of welcome to the widow, the orphan and the stranger and tax collector. Many of these stories appear in the scripture, as these are from their own experience of unwelcome.

But Jesus welcomes everyone to come, he wants to be their friends. He comforted them. And He taught His disciples to welcome the widow, the orphan and the stranger in the land and this is the way they should live.

In the Gospels, we hear these stories echoing in our hearts through the life of Jesus who was sent into the world, God breaking into the world, welcoming us into a new relationship.

In the life of Jesus, we’re reminded to welcome the other, is to welcome our encounters with God, to welcome the other, is to allow ourselves to be changed, to welcome the other, is the way we should live.

Yet it is not an easy thing to do. We all know that others are not like us and we don’t understand them. But we don’t just stop there. We try and accept these differences and open our hearts to understand them.

Today, we are in the midst of worldwide pandemic, the risk of welcome is to risk our own health and our own comfort and our own well-being.

Yet, here is the word of God for us today.

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. This invitation is here to tell us what welcome should look like, and how to establish a community of welcome which Jesus has told us to do.

The reward is here for those who welcomes a stranger, for those who shows a generous heart to others and for those who seek to live a righteous life, that is a life in right relationship with God and each other.

It is a way of living and being in the world that creates community, marked by relationship with God; is a life of abundance and hope and welcome.

It's a risky path to follow but the invitation is there to welcome the other and to discover the living Christ, who welcomes you.

Will you come on this journey of welcome with me and discover the risen Christ in the face of the other? Amen