

**BCA CONFERENCE 2018**  
**Everyone is Welcome**  
**DEVOTION**

I have a 27 year old amazing daughter who works for a Christian international organization whose vision statement includes justice and equality ..... so when I was asked to do this devotion I chose to give her a call. She certainly was able to speak into this space but there was a blog that she sent that really impacted me.

The blog started with this question.....

If you had to summarize in a single word the message of Jesus, the ethos of his Kingdom, what word would you choose?

Or another way to put it.....If you had a single word, how would you describe the vision of Jesus' Kingdom?

I can see your minds ticking over....

Without thinking I probably would say love ....love being the single word to describe the vision of Jesus kingdom.

But the single word the author of this blog chose was: WELCOME

Welcome...the single word to describe the vision of Jesus kingdom.....

Our theme is Everyone is Welcome. EVERYONE...but are they?

The definition of welcome is to greet, say hello to, salute, to host, receive, meet, embrace, receive with open arms, roll out the red carpet, to usher in, to host, show hospitality to.

The blog goes on to say .....In recent years, more and more Christian theologians are rediscovering the centrality of hospitality to the Christian life and witness..... Many theologians are speaking of Jesus' vision of *radical hospitality*, his culture-defying openness and acceptance of the other, of the outcast, of the stranger.

Radical hospitality.....this is a spiritual act, the practice of genuine graciousness and love that has nothing to do with self-interest.

Who here has not felt welcomed somewhere, has not felt that beautiful radical hospitality?

There is an event that really stands out for me.....My husband and I were invited to a church leadership dinner. We were relatively new and were just stepping into a leadership role. We were excited to be part of this group. When we arrived everyone was sitting with their team. Because we were new we didn't have a team. We ended up sitting on a table off to the side by ourselves. Nobody welcomed us to sit at their table. In fact when we asked could we sit at a few places we were told that other people were going to be sitting there. We felt alienated, ignored, lonely, uncomfortable, embarrassed. In fact I went to a place of feeling unworthy. Even though we had been invited we were not welcome, not received or allowed to be part of that group. There was a sense that some in the room felt for us but they were not able or willing to do anything about it. There was no welcome, no hospitality.

And I want to acknowledge that I rarely experience this. I know that I am privileged,..... white Anglo Saxon, protestant, and possibly not as vertically challenged as Zacchaeus .....I know how that one instance impacted me so I can't imagine what it would be like to experience this on a regular basis.....

To welcome is an action, it is to do something. It is how we treat someone with what we do, and what we say.....

So I need to ask myself....do the people that I encounter, do they feel acceptance and openness in my presence?

..... my husband, my children, my co-workers, and the strangers I meet each day.....How do I treat them in the way I welcome them?

Christine Pohl, author of "Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition", points out that "**welcome and hospitality are about recognizing the fundamental humanity of the person.**"

Do I convey this to those who encounter me? Do I convey this with a smile, with warmth and joy towards them?

Do I create a space of welcome and rest?

Going back to the blog it then goes further by stating ...."Welcome isn't just about my encounter with you in a supermarket. It is also sociological and global. How does my city welcome the poor? How does the world welcome the newborn child? .....Social justice is about welcome on the global scale."

I have been listening to the memoirs of the late Mark Colvin, who was an ABC journalist. He talks about the difference between Sherlock Holmes and his older brother Microft. Sherlock interpreted the world through his own eyes whereas Microft remained in his club and processed his world through the eyes of others.

How are we interpreting the world around us?..... Mark Colvin asks, "Do we have vicarious eyes?"

Are we a Microft or are we like Sherlock and wrestling with how to welcome people through what we personally see and lining it up with what we read in the Bible with how Jesus lived his life and what he taught?

The Prodigal Son. What a beautiful story of welcome. The father not just waiting but looking out for his son. And then when he sees him, he takes action, he lifts up his robes and runs. He embraces his son and welcomes him back into the family. And then puts on a party. Welcome and radical hospitality to the lost son.

Is this story not a parable of Jesus' kingdom? .....Welcome home child.

Matt 10 Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. **41** Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. **42** And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

And so the blog finishes with.....So, when people ask me what it means to be a Christian, what it means to follow Jesus of Nazareth, nowadays I have one answer: Welcome. Welcome to my office, my home, my time, my attention, my life. As a Christian I am called to extend the welcome of Jesus.

Let me finish with this **Prayer of Welcome**

Lord, our God, source of all life,  
you reveal yourself in the depths of our being  
drawing us to share in your life and love.  
Bless each of us as we respond to your Spirit's  
invitation to open wide the doors to Christ.  
Make the doors of our hearts,  
our homes and communities  
wide enough to receive  
all who need human love and fellowship,  
narrow enough to shut out all envy,  
prejudice and pride.

Let us hasten to welcome the stranger,  
and so welcome your Son.  
We make this prayer in his name,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.