

## Trinity 11

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Can you think of a place, a person or group of people in your life that made you feel truly welcome? What was it that made you feel like you were truly wanted and welcome?

To feel truly welcomed and wanted is a wonderful thing. It means we have found a place of belonging and I believe that deep down, we all long for that. To be welcomed, wanted and to belong. Both our readings today talk about hospitality. In our first reading we are told:

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.**

The author of Hebrews likely tries to remind people of the story of Abraham and Sarah, who show hospitality to three strangers, who suddenly appeared before Abraham. These strangers told them that Sarah would give birth to a son within a year, despite her old age. This proved to be true and the three strangers are thought to have been angels of God.

We are encouraged to offer hospitality to strangers, to people we don't know and might feel suspicious of. We are encouraged to show strangers a welcome that makes them feel wanted and like they could belong. But offering such hospitality is risky. Is it really a good idea for us to do so?

Let's consider what Jesus teaches us in our gospel reading:

**When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.**

Why does Jesus teach us to give preference to the poor and people with disabilities, over our friends, family or rich neighbours?

To be poor in all ages means to be vulnerable, any unforeseen challenge can become a threat to survival. A bad harvest can mean food prices rising and a family going hungry or even starving, a breadwinner becoming sick can mean debts and loss of housing, the breaking of a stove or other essential household equipment can mean ending up in a vicious cycle of debt. Being poor often means isolation, because there is shame and because survival takes all the time and energy available, so there is little left to invest in friendships or other supportive relationships. This is why poor people often end up at the margins of society and communities.

To have a disability in Jesus' time was to become an outcast, because people would assume that the disability was a sign of God's displeasure. It usually meant people were also condemned to poverty, because they had no way of making a living. So they were doubly unwelcome and unwanted. And while today people with disabilities can live very full lives and often can have jobs that allow them to make a living, due to the extra cost of the helping equipment and support they need, people with a disability are still statistically more likely to struggle financially. And although we no longer tend to believe that disability is a sign of God's

displeasure, people with disabilities are often pushed to the margins and experience discrimination and abuse.

Both the poor and people with disabilities, in Jesus' time and in ours, are often unwelcome, unwanted and made to understand that they do not belong. And if we have ever felt that way, even for just a moment, we know just how painful that is.

The good news is that with God, we are all welcome. Each and everyone is wanted by God and God invites anyone who wants, to belong within the love of God and within the family of God. God radically welcomes each and every human being, but with a particular care for all who are for one reason or another pushed to the margins and made outcasts.

God's radical welcome is spacious. It doesn't demand of us to be a certain way, to conform and fit in with what is the status quo. God welcomes us as we are, each one of us with our particular stories, our particular strengths and weaknesses, our cultures, our bodies, our needs and our particular gifts. All of us is welcome at God's table. And as God radically welcomes each and every one of us, God also teaches us to live out that radical welcome with all those who cross our paths.

The thing is, radical welcome is not an easy thing. To welcome people as Jesus teaches us to welcome the stranger and the people no one else wants to be friends with, the people pushed to the margins, people regularly discriminated against, is not easy. This kind of hospitality, this radical welcome, is costly. Radical welcome is costly, inconvenient and uncomfortable at times. Radical welcome means we have to make space for the other. Radical welcome for us as a church community means we have to allow for each person, who enters here, to shape and change who we are and who we are becoming as a community. Radical welcome means, we cannot ask people to park parts of themselves at

the door. All of us is welcome at God's table, the messiness, the noise, our needs and our pain. All our different languages, all our different favourite foods, our different stories and experiences, our different bodies and needs. All are welcome at God's table. Are we willing to join in with God's radical welcome? To reach out and make space, to allow for inconvenience and to bear with discomfort, in order to share with others, the radical welcome we receive from God?

Opening ourselves up to God's radical welcome and to share it with others is risky. We can never quite know what might happen, how a stranger might become a friend, a sibling in Christ, how they might transform and change a community, if we let them truly be who God made them to be. It will get uncomfortable and challenging at times and sometimes it will be inconvenient. But joining in with God's radical welcome will always also enrich us. Because as we share God's radical welcome with others, we will also encounter God's unexpected beauty and blessing in the stranger, made in God's image, like ourselves.

Amen.