

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Third Sunday after Trinity

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalm 89: 1-4.15-18

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

The theme of welcome lies at the hearts of today's gospel.

The word "welcomes" appears six times in its two verses and the phrase "whoever welcomes" four times. It is this "whoever" who is promised a reward for welcoming a disciple, a reward for welcoming the God who sends Jesus, and anyone who Jesus in turn commissions.

"Whoever" is the welcomer, God is the one received, and the reward is a sharing in the reward of prophets, the righteous (those who live according to God's will, the disciple.

So what might that reward be: what is the reward of the prophet, the righteous one, the disciple?

There is a lovely phrase used repeatedly in the Godly Play style of storytelling to introduce any prophet: he came so close to God, and God came so close to him that he knew what God wanted him to say (or do). A prophet: someone living so close to God, that God guides her to reveal what is of God in all in her speaking and action.

And a righteous one: simply a person who lives in accordance with God's will for them and the world.

And a disciple: somebody who has come so close to Jesus and learnt so much from Jesus about God's love, that they can take his good news to the world in the whole way that they live, and in all that they say.

The reward of each of these is their deep relationship with God which guides them in living as the person God calls them to be, the person God created them to be: the person who flourishes.

"Whoever welcomes" one of these people shares with them in that closeness to God as their reward for the welcome.

So the big question is, where are we in the story?

Very often the language of mission used in the church focuses on what we have to give the world around us, how we serve in Jesus' name – how we make visible the radical love God has for the world by doing things for people and telling them what they need to know about the good news. In practice, at the heart of this there is a strong call to offering hospitality, offering welcome as an act of love to build relationships and meet needs. This is a very powerful part of our call.

Nevertheless, that is not the focus of today's passage.

Today the focus is on how those who sent into the world by Jesus *receive* the welcome of others.

To be gracious as one who receives hospitality is as important in our human relationships as being a warm host, but it is not necessarily something we think a lot about – or that sermons are preached on – but for this particular gospel to have its power anyone who might be a prophet, a righteous person, a disciple, need to be able to receive a welcome from “whoever” offers it.

So, just for a moment let's be a bit nostalgic for the days before we had to be so cautious about visiting one another. Think for a moment of a time when someone was a delightful guest – when they received your hospitality fully and you enjoyed their company and your role as host.

Can you put a finger on what it is about them that makes them a good receiver of welcome?

And, what about a time when you felt able fully and comfortably to accept the welcome of another person – what were your own qualities that made you receptive?

What enables us to be good receivers of welcome?

A few things that come to mind are:

- An appreciation of the place into which we are welcome

- Allowing someone else to notice our needs and help us with them (letting them make us a cup of tea!)

- A valuing of what the welcomer has to offer us

A willingness to be ourselves

And I think there is a good kind of humility mixed in with all this that allows us to let go of controlling what is going to happen.

I wonder if you have ever thought about how cultivation these qualities of a good guest, might help you grow as an instrument of God's presence amongst your neighbours and friends.

Do we go out into every setting appreciating it as a place where God can be known?

Do we recognise that letting others see some of our vulnerabilities and help us where we need help may enable them to draw closer to God?

Can we value what we are receiving from others as much as or more than we value what we think we can give them?

Can we stay humble enough to be ourselves when others offer us their hospitality?

And this final question takes us back to our gospel passage and links us these thoughts of "receiving welcome" with participating in the mission of God, the out-flowing of the love of the Trinity.

Jesus says: whoever welcomes a disciple, a righteous one as a righteous one, a prophet as a prophet: whoever welcomes *you* welcomes him and the one who sent him.

To the extent that we stay close to God:

so close that we learn to know what God wants us to say and do, so close that we live according to his will for us, so close as Jesus' disciple that we have learnt to be like him

To the extent that we stay close to God, we offer that closeness to God to those who welcome us for who we are.

To the extent we stay close to God we reveal God's presence to be welcomed by those who welcome us. The rest, God rewards them with.

After recent months, for practical reasons we are having to think very consciously about the whole area of our own hospitality, the hospitality of others, and the wider hospitality industry in our region (praying of course, for those of our neighbours who depend on it).

In the light of today's gospel it might be good to add spiritual consideration to that conscious thought:

by intentionally doing those things that keep us close to God so that when we go out in the world we become those who bring God's closeness to others.

and, by giving attention to the way we are instruments of God whenever, and however we receive a welcome from others when that is where we are in the story.

How we look out for, listen to and welcome those who come as prophets, righteous people and companions of Jesus to bring us a share in their closeness to God, is perhaps for another sermon.....

Lord, may we be the means by which those around us welcome your love into their lives this week, and always.

Amen