

Homegroup notes – Week beginning 20th October 2013

Home group / study notes: A welcoming community?

Feel free to use as much or as little as you wish.

The aim this week is to encourage church and homegroup members to think through issues to do with our welcome, as a church, to the many and varied people who form the community of St James'. During the study and reflection you might like to be thinking about how the following overlapping aspects contribute or detract from our 'welcome'; ask God to speak to us about:

- physical (buildings etc)
- inter-personal (greetings, the ways we treat each other, etc)
- spiritual (how we connect with God and encourage one another)
- corporate (what we do when we meet together).

What are some of the different constituencies of people who make up St James'? Make a list.

Read Heb 4:12-16 Note the 'active' words... alive, hold firmly, etc. Which ones stand out for you in this passage? What are some of the qualities we should demonstrate as part of our welcome? What do we hope we will all receive?

Read Jeremiah 7:1-11 A warning... for any of us or our church? In what ways would such 'worship' be the opposite of welcoming?

Read Luke 15:1-7 How do we demonstrate Jesus' welcome today? To whom? How could we be better at celebrating (see verses 6, 9, 22-24 of Luke 15)?

Read Romans 12:9-13 Think about ways of being 'sincere' or 'authentic' Christians. Do *you* feel welcomed at church / midweek groups / to use your gifts?

This story bears revisiting since we haven't done so for a while... someone read it aloud:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought of themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and to give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency bunks with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held. About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. Some were homeless and some were refugees. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It too evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.¹

¹ Theodore O. Wedel *The Ecumenical review*, October 1953 (Paraphrased)

Turn your responses into **prayers** now, before you carry on (if you wish) talking about church practicalities! All feedback welcome, for the PCC. In what ways are we good, or not so good, at 'life-saving'?