

Jeremiah 11:18-20  
Mark 9:30-37

**Welcome!**  
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September 20, 2009

Where do you feel welcome? I thought of places where we feel welcome among the places we have visited. Two came to mind in particular. They are homes of friends where we always feel welcome and where we do not feel the need for permission to get a cup of coffee or tea, etc. We even usually get our own breakfasts and maybe lunch. If we happen to be together at the same time then that is okay, if not – that is okay, too. We come and go at our leisure and they do the same when they are visiting us. Now I am not sure if this has more to do with our friendship than with where we are but also know that others feel the same when they visit – so it must be more than that.

Contrast that to some places where it feels uncomfortable to sit without permission!

A friend of ours had a unique experience two or three years ago. He spent a weekend at Balmoral in Scotland as a guest of the queen. Now he felt welcomed there but was always aware that he was a guest of the queen.

As I read our New Testament Scripture for today I began to come to the conclusion that in this passage Jesus is teaching about who is welcomed in his kingdom. This is alone time with the disciples. Jesus is heading towards his final showdown in Jerusalem and he is being very blunt with the disciples about what it truly means to be Messiah. As the day approaches he wants them to be prepared for what is about to happen. This is the road they have chosen if they continue to stay the course with him. Jeremiah says it this way, “For to you I have committed my cause” (11:20b NIV). Jesus does not want the disciples to commit to a cause they do not understand. This is the cause they have committed themselves to.

But they don’t understand! They are even afraid to ask him any questions. Peter had tried to warn him not to talk this way a few weeks earlier. This was not the lesson they had learned about what to expect from the Messiah. It was too much for them to wrap their minds around. They did not understand and they were afraid to ask. When will they learn? When will we learn?

Now as they walk along they argue. They each have ideas as to who is the greatest, who will command places of authority in the coming Kingdom. Who will be Secretary of State, Vice-President. Which one of them will have the best, closest position to Jesus? They argue about places of authority. It is a further demonstration that they did not understand what Jesus has been teaching. They are seeking places of prominence. Their humanity comes through. They just don’t get what Messiah means.

Now comes the lesson of the day. They reach their destination and Jesus continues teaching. Of course he has to ask, “What were you talking about on the road?” No one wants to answer this one. Even Peter is silent. I imagine them seated in circle and Jesus invites a child to come and join them. As the child comes he lifts him/her up and places him/her on his lap. This is what it means to be a part of my Kingdom. If you want a place of honor then look at this child. This child who is the least in the society (especially if the child was a female – and I like to think it was!) and of importance in my kingdom. Jesus takes one who has the least authority, power and prestige in the community and elevates them to the place of honor. This little one is as important as any one else in God’s kingdom.

Reflecting on this I raised the question: What child would we not welcome? One of my favorite philosophers is Calvin of Calvin and Hobbes. He is in bed and yells, “Mom! Wake up! Come quick!” Mom responds, “What’s wrong? What’s the matter?” She

rushes from her bedroom to his and as she stands by his bed Calvin asks, “Do you think love is nothing but a biochemical reaction designed to make sure our genes get passed on?” Mom responds, “Whatever it is, it’s all that’s keeping me from strangling you right now.” The next frame has Calvin alone in bed, “Mom’s midnight reassurances are never very reassuring.” Even with midnight philosophical questions Calvin is still loved and accepted.

There is something about holding or being in the presence of a child. On Thursday we were able to celebrate our grandson’s 9<sup>th</sup> birthday. For a while he and I sat in an oversized chair and cuddled. As he was nestled in my arms I wondered when this would end. When will he become too old to cuddle with his grandfather? It is hard not to fall in love when we hold a child. For many this is when a mom really becomes a mom or a dad becomes a dad – when they hold their child for the first time. We realize the miracle. We began to comprehend the fragility of life and that we are all created in God’s image. Jesus said when we welcome a child we welcome him and in welcoming him we welcome God.

Is not the real point of Jesus’ teaching the fact that we are all children of God? We address God as father/mother/parent among other titles. We understand that we have been adopted into God’s family and we have been welcomed. The lost sheep has been found, the prodigal has come home and a party has been planned. There is/was joy and celebration at our home coming. We are now a child of God and a part of the most diverse family in heaven or on earth.

I recall a family in Maine who adopted children from all over the world (the news this morning on NBC 5 shared a story of an Edmonds family that now numbers 29. Most of the children have been adopted from Ethiopia. When asked why, the father responded, “How can you say no to a child?” -- referring to a child in need. They also sponsor and help run an orphanage in Ethiopia.) Now we are familiar with the family in Maine because our older son took their oldest daughter to her Senior Prom. The picture of them with the family is like a picture of the United Nations! They are from all over the world. It is a rainbow of God’s creation--an image of heaven. Everyone is welcome – even those with disabilities are part of this large growing family – and so are all of their friends. There is seldom a dull or quiet moment in this household, but it is okay – all are welcome.

What child would we not welcome? But wait. If we are all children of God and if we are all created in God’s image and if Jesus welcomed all children into his midst and God’s love is greater than we can imagine, who would we not welcome into God’s family? God’s love reaches far higher and far deeper than we can imagine – it reached to us!

May God give us the ability to welcome all who would come. Might we begin to see all as children, created in God’s wonderful image.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989  
Calvin and Hobbes, Watterson, Universal Press Syndicate