

Sermon : All are welcome (21/03/2021)

The word WELCOME is such a sweet word! I received an email recently from holiday planners and part of it reads:

“We are delighted to announce Duchally Country Estate will reopen on 26th April 2021. We look forward to welcoming our Members and their Guests back to Scotland. At Duchally, you know you’ll receive a warm welcome from the team”. Very inviting and assuring indeed!

After this long period of lock down, I believe many people are looking forward to a warm welcome into family and friends’ homes, and in hotels and lodges when they travel on holidays once life returns to normal. As some churches are planning to reopen their buildings, people cannot wait to be welcomed back to meet and worship in person.

Welcome is a concept of acceptance- accepting one another, receiving one another with kindness. Old Testament writers show hospitality as one of the crucial issues at the heart of God. Through the prophets , God has spoken about how people should welcome the widows and orphans, and how to love strangers and provide them with food and clothing (Deut. 10:18). Whilst Hotels and lodges will only welcome club members and guests, God is an all embracing and welcoming God.

The passage from St. John, reveals Jesus’ character of hospitality which is open to all. It echoes the idea that all are welcome in God’s house. The text tells us about some Greeks who sought to see Jesus. **Who are these people?** They are non-Jews, and they are representative of the Gentile world. Their request to see Jesus can be understood as a conventional way to request a meeting with Jesus. This has been interpreted by some as their desire to become disciples. In John 3 we see Nicodemus who came by night also desiring to be a follower of Jesus. May we too have that desire. One thing the Greeks know is that Jesus does not turn anyone away, so he will not do that to them. He values everyone as they are- the way Jesus treats the Samaritan woman- offers living water (Ch.4), the woman who was caught in the act of adultery- offers forgiveness (Ch. 8), people with leprosy and the blind. All those who were discriminated against by society. He treated them with grace. Jesus does not reject sinners.

The coming of the Greeks seeking to see Jesus implies the church’s future mission to the Gentiles and the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s promises of universal salvation. As God’s appointed High Priest, Jesus “ became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews: 5:9) Andrew and Phillip play an important role. They both demonstrate a good model of being links between ‘seekers’ and God. They do not block others from accessing grace, neither do they send them away. How have we responded to those who are lost, thirsty and hungry for God?

We are called to practice hospitality and to be a welcoming church. Welcoming those who are different from us without favouritism and prejudice. The rejected and marginalised among us , outcasts and the helpless. Let us help them to see the love and forgiveness of God. We ought to accept others as Christ has accepted us.

We are in the season of Lent, a season of repentance. Those who turn away from evil ways and come to Jesus, He will not turn them away but welcome them. If we have prevented others in their efforts to come to Christ, through our actions or words we need to repent. Welcoming outsiders or strangers should be our practice and mark as Christians. God has called us to open our doors to the migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as we sing : *All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.* And may we do so in the power of Christ whose door is always open and ready to welcome all. **Amen.**

Revd. A Nyawo