

**Matthew 10:40-42**

*<sup>40</sup>“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; <sup>42</sup>and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

I’d like to take you back to Psychology 101 of my freshman year in college. That year, I learned about Abraham Maslow’s **Hierarchy of Needs**. Maslow lived from 1908-1970, so I’m not sure when his theory became mainstream, and then a required psychology course, but perhaps you are familiar with his theory. Maslow saw human beings' needs arranged like a ladder.

- (1) **physical requirements for human survival:** Air, water, Food, shelter, sleep, and sex.
- (2) **Safety and Security needs** -living in a safe area, medical insurance, job security, financial reserves, healthy well-being.
- (3) **Social Needs:** belonging, love, acceptance: affection, friendship, intimacy, family.
- (4) **Esteem-** self-respect, accomplishment, personal worth, social recognition and reputation.
- (5) **Self-actualizing needs** - has to do with personal growth; less concerned with the opinions of others and more interested in fulfilling their potential. Truth, justice, wisdom, meaning. Maslow coined a word - Metamotivation - people who go beyond the scope of the basic needs and strive for constant betterment. In Methodist Theology, this would be termed, “Moving on to perfection”. Meta-motivated people are driven by Being Needs instead of Deficiency needs.

Have you ever thought about what your essential needs are? I’ve been thinking lately about the need for belonging and connection. I don’t think it is a need we ever outgrow. Belonging and a welcome are closely related, and I was reminded recently that a sense of safety and trust can be established and in a moment they can also be destroyed. I was in process of renting at my home to people I knew, and I was still living there when they moved in with their two cats. In the beginning, my dog Denali still had her safe haven in her home, but at some point the power shifted. The cats became more comfortable and started following and taunting Denali. She no longer felt welcome in a place that had been her home, her place of refuge and safety the past five years.

Jesus said, Whoever **welcomes** a stranger, a prophet, a little one, welcomes me. Let’s look at the word welcome. It is a common word adorning floor mats; on signs as you enter a new state or town. Its roots come from two words: well and come. The root of "well" could mean something close to our current understanding of "wellness" or "well-being". "Come" finds its roots in an Old English word "comer": one who arrives. In the earliest understanding, “welcome” offered an invitation to come and be well. It is an invitation to be received into the goodness of this new place.

Welcoming the stranger is rooted in scripture, in ancient practices of hospitality. Faithfulness to God was measured by the hospitality one offered. When a traveler came to town, there was a tradition of someone waiting by the well, to offer a cup of cold water and hospitality to the visitor for the night.

These travelers were rarely family. They were foreigners with different foods, clothes, languages, gods - a different way of being. Opening one's home was risky. But this was central to Hebrew identity. Hospitality defined them as a people. The Israelites had been foreigners living in other lands, and they were to remember what it was like to need a warm, hospitable welcome. And they also had a sense that in welcoming others, they were welcoming God into their homes, entertaining the divine in disguise. You never knew when God might show up at your house for a stay.

Welcoming prophets and "little ones" was a disciplined practice of the young churches. Hospitality should be the central practice of the Christian church today, not just in our worship life in the church, but in our daily life as a people moving on to perfection and self-actualization. If we cultivate it as a spiritual practice, this practice will be with us all the days of our lives. Kathleen Norris tells a story of a nun with Alzheimer's, who asks to be wheeled to the door of her nursing home every day so she can greet every guest. Said another nun of her sister, "**She is no longer certain what she is welcoming people to...but hospitality is so deeply ingrained in her that it has become her whole life**" (Amazing Grace 265).

A study of visitors to churches was conducted and the results were interesting of those who chose to stay at a particular church.

1. Because of what the pastor was like as a person.
2. Because members made me feel welcomed when I attended.
3. Because it helped me in my attempt to live a Christian life.
4. Because I especially like the worship services.
5. Because it was a place where my children could receive good religious education.
6. Because the pastor preaches good sermons.
7. Because I felt that something was missing in my life.

What was the second highest factor? "Because people made me feel welcomed when I attended." What was the sixth highest factor? "Because the pastor preaches good sermons." What people said in the pews to each other during and after the worship was more important in helping people determine if they wanted to join a particular congregation than what the pastor said from the pulpit. We often undervalue the power of being a genuinely and deeply welcoming community. The quality of the welcoming is a sign of what may happen later. If you are welcomed warmly in the first encounter, you may be loved and accepted later and find a sense of belonging later.

Jesus said, "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*" Jesus further identifies kindness as a primary indicator of discipleship. 6 acts—hosting the stranger, clothing the naked, feeding the

hungry, watering the thirsty, tending the sick, visiting the prisoner. Margaret Mead saw the value of little kindnesses in her study of ancient cultures. One day a student asked her for the very earliest sign of civilization in a culture. He expected the answer to be a clay pot or a fishhook or maybe a stone for grinding grain. Her answers startled him: a healed femur. She explained that no healed femurs are found among savages. Skulls crushed by clubs, yes, and temples pierced by arrows, but no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle—survival of the fittest—reigns. A healed femur shows that someone had to show compassion. Someone had to care for that person with the broken leg while it healed. Someone had to do that injured person's hunting and bring him or her food until it healed. The practice of kindness is the first sign of civilization.

Hospitality is a sacred art. It is a holy and whole-making act. May God continue to open our eyes, our ears, our hands, our hearts-and, indeed, our very lives-to the strangers among us, so that we might welcome all in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Child of God, beloved of God, companion of God, in all your journeys and  
becomings,  
all your changes and challenges, all doings and undoings and unknowings,  
The Blessing One embraces you, the Delighting One accompanies you,  
The One enfolds you. All that is holy and strong in you cannot change or be taken; it is  
eternal.  
Your wholeness is unfolding. Each day is a newness, a birth, each challenge a chance  
to learn.  
You will be well, and a blessing to this earth. Heaven travels with you.  
Go in grace. Go in blessing. Go in peace.*