

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

25.06.2017
By Ruth Harvey

Introduction

This text comes after Jesus outlines the ministry of teaching and preaching to his disciples. What is the welcome you can expect? What reward can you anticipate? Having alerted them to the rejection they may experience Jesus now offers them, and us, a meta-reassurance: expect radical hospitality.

Text

Matthew 10:40-42

‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 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; 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.’

Comment

When my child was eight she returned from her first school residential. I stood ready to welcome her home, at the corner of the playing field, younger children in tow. As she appeared, bag-laden around the corner of the school building I was unable to restrain myself! I leapt, squealed, and ran to her: arms open wide.

The unrestrained welcome of a parent – oblivious to the embarrassment or shock of others – receiving their child home; the instinctive action of the beloved being swept up in the arms of the lover: this is our vision of life beyond life, the radical welcome of God that awaits each and all. This is the meta-reassurance that we receive from Jesus in this text. No matter how hard the path, how costly the

hospitality, how painful the rejection, staying as close as we are able to the truth of Jesus' teaching will reap rich rewards and a joyously unrestrained godly-welcome. This is radical hospitality.

The disciples had been coached by Jesus until now to expect little reward and a mixed welcome as they travelled preaching, teaching and sharing the good news. Indeed, they were to expect persecution, ridicule, rejection: even death. So it may be for reconcilers. Conflict mediators can expect hostility, even death threats from those with whom they are working. If the stakes are high, the promise of reconciliation may be too tough to absorb. Rejecting the messenger may be the only 'safe' response. The welcome may be hostile, even aggressive.

Like the journey of mission, the journey of reconciliation is tough. In the context of dispute, or conflict, of war even, the invitation from this text is to look less at the differences and the characteristics that divide us but rather to look deep-to-deep, eye-to-eye, soul-to-soul connection that binds prophet with prophet, reconciler with reconciler.

In our mid-covid 'cocooning' context how do we offer ourselves and the 'other' this kind of deep radical welcome and reward?

In weekly worship we are meeting deep with deep through welcoming the teaching of Jesus' reconciliation into the heart of our homes. The reward? A new way to connect with God and with our community.

In radical acts of hospitality we care for our vulnerable neighbour at a distance. The reward? Our elderly neighbours know they can rely on those around them for food security.

In opening up guarded spaces such as unused hostels, or gorgeous convent rooms, the homeless are welcomed and housed. The reward? We honour each individual for who, not what they are.

In embracing the invitation to travel less, fly even less, our planet breathes. The reward? Creation is renewed.

As with all change we must remain determined and focussed even in the face of ridicule, persecution, even threat of death. For a culture to go through a sustainable change, first we must notice and adapt our everyday behaviours until these become habitual. Sustained new behaviours evolve into new habits which themselves then generate a healthy, healing culture for the longer term.

In the work of reconciliation, our task is to notice patterns of behaviour that are destructive and work over the long term to embed new patterns of listening, of confessing, of forgiving, of being open to the possibility of change: radical patterns of welcome and reward.

How might patterns of preaching and teaching God's word be woven into the sustainable fabric of our daily lives?
What is your experience of radical welcome?
To whom have you offered this moment of radical, costly hospitality?

Prayer

Welcoming God
when we have rejected
your wide open arms
forgive us.

Embracing God
when we have closed the door
on the homeless, the lost, the sick,
remind us

that your welcome at our birth,
and your radical hospitality at our death
are unconditional moments of grace
- of welcome and reward -

which in our turn we offer to
the 'other' always in our midst.

In the name of Jesus,
the reconciling Son and Christ we pray.
Amen