

The Welcome Problem

It seems to me that the problem of welcome and hospitality is really a part of growing up. It reminds me of a scripture in 1 Corinthians 13:11 *"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."* Children do not have a mature sense of who they are and they are not very secure in their self worth. They are very much defined by their families and peers and their speech, thought process, and ability to reason is in formation. It will take a while before children begin to develop self worth and sense the fullness of their own character. It is difficult, when one does not love and accept one's self fully, to love and appreciate anyone else for who and what they are as a person. Children find it difficult to allow other children to play with their toys and possessions because they worry about the other invading their space and depleting them of what they value. Until we grow into maturity and have that definitive sense of our value and place in life we find it hard to welcome strangers and show hospitality to include others for whom they are and what they will bring into our lives. Perhaps too many adults still define themselves by education, work, a home, and possessions to claim their true character and grace that they actually bring to the table of life. That age old question of "who are you" is still quite unsettled for them.

Until we know, love, and accept our true selves in as complete a way as possible, I believe we identify another facet of our reluctance to openly express welcome for others and engage them hospitably. In John's Gospel, 8:32, we are told that Jesus said to those listening to him, *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* They responded by claiming that they were never slaves to anyone so, in their minds, they were already free. Here again I believe that too many people, who are not technically enslaved, are bound by a lot of pressures and circumstances of living so that they are surely, figuratively speaking, enslaved. Many people feel enslaved to the very things that they rely on to give them self worth like, education, work, and their accumulation of physical assets. Some in our present economy, even those without mortgage or debt, are never sure that they will always have these temporal assets. Like the old saying, "easy come, easy go", many are floundering without these so called assets. Until one is able to know who they really are and take pride in their particular gifts of personhood they can become enslaved. The knowledge and awareness of who we really are is essential for the freedom to welcome and share hospitality with others.

Finally then, I am reminded in scripture of the words that were said by Pilot, "What is truth?" *"Truth can have a variety of meanings, such as the state of being in accord with a particular fact or reality, or being in accord with the body of real things, real events or actualities. It can also mean having fidelity to an original or to a standard or ideal. In a common archaic usage it also meant constancy or sincerity in action or character."* (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary) Truth can be a complicated subject as there are various theories and viewpoints written on this subject, but here I would like to simply suggest that discovering your own truth about yourself is extremely important to you and the way you will relate to everyone and everything else. It is important for you to know your own truth because you will always be the primary source of conveying who you really are to the world.

Another significant difficulty with welcome and hospitality is because of our common fear and dislike of those who we perceive as being different. We may speak about our being from one God, who is the Creator of all, but that does not seem to work out in the way we live or treat each other. The fact is that we are all genetically related. Science has now affirmed our basic kinship with the discovery of the genetic code. Each of us came from the sharing of our genetic imprint when an egg and sperm came together to begin the fascinating process of making a child. *"Genes are how living organisms*

inherit features from their ancestors; for example, children usually look like their parents because they have inherited their parents' genes. Genetics tries to identify which features are inherited, and explain how these features are passed from generation to generation. ... The function of genes is to provide the information needed to make molecules called proteins in cells. Cells are the smallest independent parts of organisms: the human body contains about 100 trillion cells, while very small organisms like bacteria are just one single cell. A cell is like a miniature and very complex factory that can make all the parts needed to produce a copy of itself, which happens when cells divide."

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Introduction_to_genetics]

The diversity of our world and the individuality of each person is one of the most incredible aspects of creation. When there is so much that unites us it is sad that we devise so many ways to separate and isolate from each other and the beautiful interrelationship we must respectfully protect. One of the most divisive and hideously cruel hoaxes still alive today is Race! The truth is that we all came from Africa and that we migrated from there. This is why we call the northern region of Africa the cradle of civilization. It is now clear in academia that Race does not exist in reality. It grew into a reality that has brought untold divisions between people and has been used as an attempt to claim racial superiority causing untold negativity and even death to those who were deemed inferior.

Several years ago we were privileged to visit the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, New Jersey where an exhibit demonstrated that, in fact, the classification of Race is false. This exhibit was titled, *"Are We So Different". It demonstrated, "A new look at Race through three lenses – History, Human variation, and Lived Experience"*. This exhibit has been moving around our country and the world clearly demonstrating what we need to know today. Fortunately it is clearly defined and detailed on a website that everyone can view to understand the truth of our common humanity, especially in disallowing the myth of Race. I encourage you to visit it as often as you like to obtain the extensive information available there: [<http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html>]

If we allowed "truth" to motivate us, welcome and hospitality should be easy for us. The "truth" of our common ancestry should enable us to be free; free from the fear of others and the prejudice that so often brings emotional and physical destruction among us. Many people are moved by popular musical tunes and vocal lyrics but they do not seem to practice in life what inspires their souls. Here are some recent examples:

It's a small world after all – [Millions have heard this at Disney World]

*It's a world of laughter,
A world of tears, It's a world of hopes, And a world of fears.*

*There's so much that we share, That it's time we're aware, It's a small world after all.
It's a small world after all, It's a small world after all*

*It's a small world after all; It's a small, small world.
There is just one moon and one golden sun, and a smile means Friendship to everyone,*

Though the mountains divide and the oceans are wide, It's a small world after all.

We are the world:

[written by Michael Jackson – raising millions for children around the world]

*There comes a time
When we heed a certain call
When the world must come together as one
There are people dying
And it's time to lend a hand to life
The greatest gift of all*

*We can't go on
Pretending day by day
That someone somewhere will soon make a change
We are all a part of
God's great big family
And the truth, you know love is all we need*

*Send them your heart
So they'll know that someone cares
And their lives will be stronger and free
As God has shown us by turning stone to bread
So we all must lend a helping hand*

*When you're down and out
There seems no hope at all
But if you just believe
There's no way we can fall
Well, well, well, well, let us realize
That a change will only come
When we stand together as one*

*[Chorus]
We are the world
We are the children
We are the ones who make a brighter day
So let's start giving
There's a choice we're making
We're saving our own lives
It's true we'll make a better day
Just you and me*

Religion that is supposed to bring peace and establish justice in the world has often been the greatest cause of war and injustice. With passage of time the separation and dogmatic claims of these organized groups have multiplied, claiming their exclusive revealed truth about God and righteousness. Few people appreciate change and most people are rather resistant to change. When you go to join any church, or most organized groups for that matter, you are most likely the one who will have to change. Your welcome and their hospitality will usually depend on your willingness to accept and adopt the ways of the group. While there are numerous organized religious bodies in our country the number continues to grow each year. When America began in the 17th century there were only few major churches. While we might wish to think that all Christian churches would have equal

respect for one another, this is not the case. To make my point, here are three major examples of this notable exclusivity.

“Catholics believe that theirs is the one true Church of Jesus Christ, firstly, because theirs is the only Christian Church that goes back in history to the time of Christ; secondly, because theirs is the only Christian Church which possesses the invincible unity, the intrinsic holiness, the continual universality and the indisputable apostolicity which Christ said would distinguish His true Church; and thirdly, because the Apostles and primitive Church Fathers, who certainly were members of Christ's true Church, all professed membership in this same Catholic Church (See Apostles' Creed and the Primitive Christian letters). Wrote Ignatius of Antioch, illustrious Church Father of the first century: “Where the Bishop is, there let the multitude of believers be; even as where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church.” Our Lord said: “There shall be one fold and one shepherd, yet it is well known that the various Christian denominations cannot agree on what Christ actually taught. Since Christ roundly condemned interdenominationalism (“And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” Mark 3:25), Catholics cannot believe that He would ever sanction it in His Church.”

[<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/a/faq-cc.html - q4>]

There are many separate and independent Protestant groups in America and it is hard to summarize them briefly. Like most religious groups each of them feels that they bear the real truth about God and in some ways are best. I have chosen this song sung by many Protestant groups, to represent their basic sentiment:

One door and only one, And yet its sides are two, Inside and outside, On which side are you?

One Door and Only One, And yet its sides are two, I'm on the inside, On which side are you?

One lord and only one, And yet its ways are two, right way and wrong way, on which way are you?

One lord and only one, And yet its ways are two, I'm on the right way, on which way are you?

One book and only one, which tells the place is true, good place or bad place, on which place are you?

One book and only one, which tells the place is true, I choose the good place, on which place is you?

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official name of the religion commonly called the Mormon Church. It was established April 6, 1830 by Joseph Smith, the first president of the Church. We believe he was called by God to be a prophet in the modern era, like Moses and Abraham in biblical times. Joseph Smith saw God and Jesus Christ in a vision after praying to know which church to join. They called on him to restore the church Christ organized when He was on earth, with the proper organization and priesthood authority that had been lost shortly after the Savior's death.” [<http://www.mormon.org/about-us/>]

So what is the good news?

Since we know that change is inevitable we must learn how to flow with the ever-present change in our lives. The good news is that we do not have to go it alone! This is why a welcoming and hospitable community is the absolute solution to our growing and becoming all that we can and should be in life. This is my whole point in writing this paper and why various forms of community need to become genuine and proficient in “All Are Welcome”.

We know that one is too small a number to accomplish much in anything. We recognize that addition is an important part of the mathematical principles. It is clear that division has a place in math, but it does not do well in areas of social function. The prize, however, is multiplication! This is like one of

the “wonders of the world”, like in the mathematics of compound interest, it creates a fast track in getting ahead financially. So it is when we multiply our opportunities in social interaction with others, providing they are hospitable and encouraging, we can progress in our personal development and in our interdependence with each other. When we remain open to change within the environment of a community of hospitality and welcome, we are enabled to grow and change more efficiently in the whole of our life practice and experience.

No one should pretend to have all the answers in any field of knowledge and understanding. Those who have many more questions than answers always find better answers. The most stifling people and communities are those with all the answers and insist that you conform and agree with their knowledge and understanding. The best change for life comes when one is able to engage in adding, subtracting, and multiplying through interactions with others who sense the same joy in such creativity. People of HOPE, who are **H**abitually **O**pen to **P**rogressive **E**xploration, serve each other and our world with the kind of “right” that brings “might” toward welcome and hospitality.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God’s love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.

Addendum:

There are many recent authors who, in one way or another, have espoused the importance of welcome and hospitality in our lives, especially among the religious. If we are to maintain civility in this 21st century we might consider more seriously their writings. Each comes from a variety of backgrounds and traditions and most have written many books that speak to today's issues.

*Marcus J. Borg, “The Heart of Christianity” (distinguished professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University) [<http://www.marcusjborg.com/>]

*Joseph Campbell, “Thou Art That” (teacher and author in the field of comparative mythology)
[<http://www.jcf.org/new/index.php>]

*Dale Carnegie, “How to Win Friends & Influence People” (1888 – 1955)
[<http://www.answers.com/topic/dale-carnegie>]

*Deepak Chopra, M.D., “Jesus” (best selling author of many books)
[<http://www.chopra.com/aboutus>]
Best-selling author, mind-body healing pioneer, and Chopra Center co-founder

*Charles E. Curran, “Faithful Dissent” (a moral theologian)
[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Curran_\(theologian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Curran_(theologian))]

*Paul Davies, “God and the New Physics” (a theoretical physicist and cosmologist)
[<http://cosmos.asu.edu/>]

*Dr. Wayne W. Dyer, “The Power Of Intention” (Internationally renowned author and speaker)
[<http://www.drwaynedyer.com/>]

*Irving Greenberg, "For The Sake Of Heaven And Earth" (an Orthodox Rabbi and Professor)

[http://www.clal.org/clal_faculty_yg.html] & [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving_Greenberg]

*John C. Maxwell, (numerous books on leadership) [<http://www.johnmaxwell.com/>]
An internationally respected leadership expert, speaker, and author

*Richard Rohr, "The Naked Now - Learning to See as the Mystics See"
[<http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/>]

*The Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong , (retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, NJ)
Especially: "Why Christianity Must Change or Die" and some others
[<http://www.johnshelbyspong.com/publicsite/index.aspx>]
He has written numerous books and travels widely teaching and giving lectures

*Samir Selmanovic, "It's All About God" [<http://www.samirselmanovic.com>]