

Romans 15:1-13 - Welcome ¹

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout with four pictures of “Welcome.”

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

Do any of these photographs remind you of a time you felt welcomed? Share that experience with us.

We’ve all seen welcome signs and welcome mats. But what are some signs or symbols that demonstrate that you are not welcome?

Information

Advent is a season of preparing to welcome Jesus. Can we think of some Bible stories of when Jesus was welcomed in his ministry? Let’s try to think of at least three stories. (Some examples might include: Crowds wanting to see miracles, The Jewish leader, Nicodemus, addressing Jesus as Rabbi, The Samaritans after Jesus spoke to the woman at the well; Zaccheus inviting Jesus to dinner; Other stories of meals and parties, etc.)

Yet, according to John’s prologue, when God came to earth in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, he was not welcomed.

- Have a class member read John 1:10-13.

“He came unto his own,” John says. Who were “his own?”

Usually ‘his own’ is interpreted as “to the Jews.” Is it possible John also meant “to fellow human beings”? Why or why not?

Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of man” Meaning he was one of us, fully human. As Christians, we believe that Jesus was also “Christ,” the divine savior. Christ wore flesh, yet was sinless. The book of Hebrews illustrates this with the image of a divine broker or go-between – a high priest.

- Have a class member read Hebrews 4:14-15.

When we think of Christmas, we think of welcoming the baby Jesus. What are some “welcome” stories we find in the gospels about Jesus’ Advent? (Shepherds, Angels, Wise men)

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Even in these stories, there is a pattern of welcome and then rejection. Is this, ultimately, the story of peoples' response to this carpenter preacher?

Jesus came preaching about an advent - the Advent of a new king to lead a new kingdom.

- Have a class member read Mark 1:14-15.

“The Kingdom of (fill in the blank)” is a political term.

Let's think about a monarchy.

What is the role of a king?

How many people can be king?

How limited is a king's power over his subjects?

Can a king make his people give him/his kingdom money? Can he force people to go from one town to another to pay their taxes?

Can a king take a person's life?

Can a king be the bearer of life?

In politics, even in monarchies, there are parties and there are factions within parties. There is diversity with various opinions and theories and behaviors.

Jesus comes from heaven to welcome us into the Kingdom. Jesus welcomes us from a position of strength. Jesus comes because of God's love for the world. As the song, “Jesus Loves Me” says, “Little ones to Him belong, We are weak but he is strong.”

Jesus' welcome is universally inclusive. Again, a core gospel teaching is found in the children's son, “Jesus Loves the Little Children”: “all the children of the world.”

This truth is threaded throughout the Bible. God loves Jews and everyone else. This thread begins in Genesis with Abram's call.

- Have a class member read Genesis 12:1-3.

Abram will be blessed so that through him, all nations can be blessed.

The descendants of Abraham and Sarah often forgot this. They seemed to think that since God had spoken through their prophets like Abraham and Moses, they were uniquely God's children. But other prophets, like Isaiah, arose to remind them that God loved everyone and that salvation was available to everyone.

- Have class members read Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 52:10 and 60:3.

When the Temple in Jerusalem was built, the large courtyard that surrounded the Jews-only courts was for non-Jews, called the Gentile Court. This was in response to another of Isaiah's prophecies that all nations would come to worship God there.

- Have a class member read Isaiah 56:6-8.

In Paul's letter to the church at Rome, Paul speaks of the strength of the follower of God, God's welcome of us, and of the wonder of these truths.

- Have a class member read Romans 15:1-6.

Paul says that some are strong and some are weak.

“The implication is of a strength or power which gives prominence and the possibility of dominating others...For Paul, of course, that thought is not of physical strength, but of strength of superior knowledge and understanding of how God's grace works.”²

What is the difference between tolerance and acceptance? What does tolerance say about a person's maturity and strength? What does acceptance say about a person's maturity and strength?

As God in the flesh, Jesus demonstrated that God is strong enough to be weak, to condescend, to trust in others who are (obviously) weaker than God is.

The Book of Romans is a letter written to people living in the capital city, Rome. Rome, like any capital city, is enveloped with power and obsessed with power. A key identity question is who is “in” and who is “out” of favor, therefore who has power.

- Have a class member read Romans 15:7-9.

“The danger of self-righteousness lies in its tendency to make one's own convictions the measure of the validity of the convictions of all others. Paul frames his discussion in terms of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ and shows that both groups are in danger of allowing their convictions about proper Christian obedience in everyday matters to disrupt the community of the faithful.”³

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, 9-16* Word Biblical Commentary, 2 volumes (Dallas: Word, 1988), 2:837.

³ Paul Achtemeier, *Romans, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), 215.

All are welcomed into the Kingdom of God - Jews and Gentiles. Naturally, they come with different backgrounds, sets of morals, and convictions about what is important. Yet, Paul urges unity.

“It is precisely such condemnation of one group by the other that Paul condemns. Paul does not take sides on whether ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ are more correct. He is intent rather on meeting the threat to Christian unity posed by the attempt of one of the groups to make its convictions about conduct the sole and exclusive measure of true and faithful response to God’s gift of his Son. He advice to both groups is the same: Respect the convictions of the other group.”⁴

“Paul’s exhortation is not a compromise, but christologically centered. . . Their tolerance is not a capitulation to error but a recapitulation of the Messiah’s own self-giving service.”⁵

We are to be welcoming people because we follow a welcoming God.

Suddenly, Paul is overwhelmed by this truth as a flood of scriptures comes to mind that reinforces this wonder of God’s hospitality.

- Have a class member read Romans 15:9b-13.

“The phrase ‘for the glory of God’ modifies both verbs; that is, both the imperative ‘welcome’ and the indicative statement of Christ’s own ‘welcome’ that Christ offers us is for God’s glory, so the ‘welcome’ Paul exhorts needs to be of the same sort. His verse provides a clue to the whole section, in that it involves a human action learned from Christ’s own action, and it also has to do not only with human reconciliation but also with God’s glory.”⁶

“Rescuing Gentiles was not an afterthought but part of the unswerving divine purpose for the whole world, where the messianic servant redeemed Jews and Gentiles and made them covenant partners in the renewed people of God.”⁷

“Christ’s servanthood has a dual purpose: to confirm the promises of the ancestors and so that gentiles would glorify God for God’s mercies. . . Israel receives God’s promises, but gentiles are also included in the promises. . . In effect, this statement encapsulates the gospel’s astonishing

⁴ Achtemeier, 216.

⁵ Michael F. Bird, *Romans, The Story of God Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 481.

⁶ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Romans: A Commentary, The New Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2024), 406.

⁷ Bird, 485.

character not only of welcoming the other but of welcoming the other on terms that are unexpected, and for God's own glory."⁸

Transformational Exercise

Two questions for us to ponder: (Ask the first question. Following that question, as the second.)

- If Jesus moved into our neighborhood, would it welcome him?
- If Jesus joined our church, would we welcome him?

If the Spirit led Jesus to listen to and obey the Father, and we have this same Spirit living in us, reminding us of the gospel teachings and life of Christ, then we should be in sync. We welcome Jesus and the incarnation of our deepest dreams and highest hopes. And, we are stunned that he loves "whosoever will" with a love that is wider than we can imagine - a love that is more than we deserve.

Close in a prayer something like this: *You came to your own when you took on flesh and blood. You came to us. And you continue to desire to be with us. Welcome, Jesus. Welcome to our world, to our church, to our individual lives. Welcome. Make us worthy of your presence. Amen.*

⁸ Gaventa, 407.