

## Sermon - 28th June - Welcome

The Story so far..

Israel is a small country surrounded by big enemies. After King Solomon's death the land is split in 2, and after a few hundred years the North - Israel - is taken into exile. Now the Southern Kingdom - Judah - is about to be swallowed up by the Babylonian Empire..

Jerusalem is surrounded. Armies are at the gates.

The king wants to know whether he should fight or surrender, so he asks his prophets. They all say there will be peace and harmony, that he has nothing to worry about, and a prophet called Hananiah even says that the exiles from the North will be brought back.

Then Jeremiah speaks..

Jeremiah 28: 5-9

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. 6 He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. 7 Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: 8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. 9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."

So Jeremiah says - don't trust these prophets of peace. I mean its great if there really is peace, then you'll know that they spoke the truth - but don't believe it just because it what you want to hear..

We often think prophecy is about telling the future, but in fact its much more than that. Its simply giving a message from God - and it might be about the future, but not always. And it might be nice things - like God says you're going to have a great life - or more often in the Bible, the prophets warn about what will happen if they carry on. So for example, Amos says - repent of the bad ways and unjust ways you treat the poor and the stranger and widow and the orphan, or else God will judge you like a plumb line.

So Jeremiah was a true prophet from God and he didn't just tell people what they wanted to hear. He told people what God told him to say, which often didn't go down very well, and people treated him quite badly.

I wonder how often we want people to tell us only nice things, to say the things we want to hear. How often we want God to be on our side, and we wish that he would just say the easy things.

But often the easy thing is not the truth - about God or about us. Sometimes the easy is not the most helpful thing.

I mean if you're driving too fast and the person next to you says nothing- that's not good, even if its the easy thing. The hard thing, but the truth is to say - slow down dear, you don't want to have an accident.

And when someone says - eat as many sweets as you like, don't bother with brushing your teeth - it sounds great - its the easy thing to say and to hear. But its not true. I know - look at my teeth or what's left of them sometime - its a horror show. Its not helpful to say the easy thing. People who really care for us say - don't eat so many sweets between meals and brush your teeth.

Next time someone says something you don't want to hear - just stop, before you ignore it - and think - maybe its true, maybe they're' trying to help me.

And what will help you know if this person is telling the truth is whether they love you.

You see Jeremiah told the Israelites some hard things, but he also went with them, when they were taken into exile (as he'd said they would) and he went with them to show that God was still with them, even when they were far away from where they were meant to be - God was still with them, and he loved them.

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**Matthew 10: 40-42**

**40 “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”**

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Jesus is speaking to the 12 disciples who he’s just named, remember the week before last - and he’s sending them out to preach the gospel.. to go into the villages and towns and tell people about the kingdom of God, about Jesus.

and Jesus tells people to welcome his disciples.

And in turn, Matthew, by writing this down, was telling his readers, his church - which we think might be up in Antioch - same church St.Paul was at.

He was telling the church to welcome disciples, followers, christian, those on mission

Why?

he says that whoever welcomes these missionaries, actually welcome Jesus.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me,

And that with Jesus comes “the one who sent me” that is God the Father.

welcome the messenger of God, you welcome the message of God

accept the disciples telling you about God - is the same as accepting God

So here are the villagers, in their village, and the disciples come down the road, and they say - we’re here to tell you about Jesus, and someone says - come into my house and tell us - and what happens is that Jesus and God, comes into those people’s houses and hearts.

That’s incredible.

so think about that - if these people are basically carrying - not just some words, but God himself - then hey! roll out the red carpet.

If i’d known you were coming, I’d have baked a cake!

If I’d known you were the queen in disguise - I’d have given you the best china

if I’d known you were fabulously wealthy, I would have treated you better!

cos we’re like that - we have a pecking order - those at the top, and those at the bottom.

In the old days there was a front parlour - a room never used except for the most special visitor, even the chairs had covers on them - like the vicar, or the sainted aunt!

others come in the trades entrance..

we rank people, and I’m afraid some come lower down..

and Jesus here says - welcome disciples, christians, missionaries as if they were God - treat them the best!

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But there’s more..

this verse is also in the other gospels where Jesus says to welcome the children

And whoever welcomes the child, welcomes me...

in Jesus time children were well down the pecking order.. so when he says - welcome the little children, let them come to me, and whoever welcomes a child welcomes me  
he’s not saying - we must welcome others - especially the honoured guests  
he’s saying - we - must - welcome - all

especially

if they don't look the same, sound the same, think the same, behave the same,  
or if we rank them lower..  
and even if they make us cross or we have to change

cos that's the thing about welcoming others - they will challenge us.  
and in some ways the smelly homeless = well we knew they'd be like that  
and the punk rocker or goth - we know that they're soft underneath  
almost its harder to accept the person with racist views, or the person who brings conflict, -  
because they require a lot more of us - they need better boundaries, they need lovingly to be  
shown a better way, they need good parenting. and We're not historically good at that in church.  
We are great at being the rescuers, the benefactors - you need food, you need shelter - we'll do it!  
Adn when we find difficult people, we often turn into doormats - come on in and walk all over us

But Jesus stood up to people and forced them to think about their lives, their choices..  
He told the rich young man to sell his possessions, I don't know what he told Zaccheus, but he did  
give away his riches. He told the woman who reached out to touch his cloak to be healed in secret  
that she must come out and show herself.  
Jesus welcomed and loved all people, but that doesn't mean he was ok with how they were - he  
wanted to love them to a better place, to be better people.  
And we need to try to do that too.

so - welcome adn hospitality is a the heart of what it means to be a child of God  
everyone who comes into church - should be welcomed as if they are messengers of God himself

And when we accept people in Jesus name - children, homeless, rich poor etc -  
we do so knowing that they will challenge us

what can this homeless person show me of God  
what can this really bad singer show me of God

how will we have to change when our new children and families worker comes?

But this is who we are - our identity - people who are accepted by God  
we have been loved - unconditionally, unfairly, undeservedly -

and so we must make a place, make room in our hearts, to accept others  
we must love others in the same way

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remember who we are if we are in Jesus tribe -  
we are called adn chosen by name  
we are adopted into God's family - God is our father and mother - we are dearly loved  
and  
we must welcome others - accept others  
even though that will change us

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