

Hello, This is Pastor Matthew Woods, Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in New Albany, Indiana and this is the weekly devotion for Monday June 29, 2020

“A Welcome Worthy of Our Savior”

Sometime during my first year of seminary I was driving home back to Michigan from St. Louis. The car I was driving, had been very faithful. Ultimately I drove that car from high school all the way through my first year of marriage—just about a decade. My trusty little Dodge Aries had gotten me to California and back, and taken me on numerous trips back and forth to Seminary in St. Louis but this trip something happened. Besides being what my mother-in-law called an “unfortunate color” the gold, “little car that could” also had a hard knock in it. For years that knock had gotten so noticeable that most people thought I was driving a diesel. “No, it just does that...” I would tell them.

About forty miles from Fort Wayne, the knock stopped and the car lost power then quit. I was still rolling so I threw it into neutral and tried starting it up and eventually learning to keep pushing on the gas to keep it running. By the top of the exit ramp I barely limped along turning into the only gas station at that exit at the time. I crawled into a parking spot, as if to grasp on last breath and then died. I would later find out from the guy that replaced the engine that one of the pistons broke inside.

Strange thing was I don’t remember feeling anxious about being stranded but perfectly at peace. I called home—on a pay phone—didn’t have cell phones back then. Before I knew it my former youth director back home called her best friend who happened to live on the south side of Fort Wayne. Within hours she and her brother showed up with a trailer and we were on the road again to their place in Fort Wayne. They were wonderful—perfect strangers to me but any friend of my youth director was a friend of theirs. They drove me and my car to their home, gave me a place to sleep for the night, place to clean up in the morning, and when I offered them some money, they refused it. Their hospitality made the whole event into a blessing. By the next morning my cousin showed up with her truck, my mom in the passenger seat—a four-hour drive down and then back with a car dolly—me and my unfortunate gold car made it home. It was trip filled with grace—and it’s the grace of many and their hospitality that makes me remember it so fondly.

Jesus says in Matthew 10: ⁴⁰ “He who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward.⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

In the context of battle and division between father and sons, mothers and daughters comes this discussion of hospitality. You remember back a few years when young Rifqa Bary, Muslim teenage girl from Pakistan, living in Ohio came to faith in Jesus her father and family rejected her, even threatened her life. She became famous for going to court to escape her parents. The sword, that is the Gospel will have this effect. And yet Rifqa found welcome among other Christians who in their welcome fostered a greater faith in Jesus and the courage to choose Jesus over her family. Here in this context of division Jesus talks of welcome in verses 40-42.

But this welcome is to share more than food or water. Perhaps a welcome in Christ is to share in faith's rewards...and even its consequences. Those who receive a Muslim girl who converts to Christianity may also share and receive the same threats and burdens—a prophet's reward. If one was to harbor a prophet in the time of Jezebel, who sought to end all prophets, especially Elijah, you as one who welcomed Elijah to your home back then could have suffered her wrath for doing so. The same can be said of a righteous man's reward. But Jesus says, he who receives you will receive Jesus. And whoever receives Jesus receives the One who sent Him, namely the Heavenly Father.

If I was the parent of a child who was stranded, but helped by a stranger, that stranger also gives help to me as a grateful parent. By welcoming my child you have welcomed me. To give a child of Jesus a cup of cool water is to receive Jesus in the same way because you shared in their circumstances and assumed a role in their life.

Scripture says a lot about hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9 says, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." Leviticus 19:34 even goes so far as to say to love a stranger is to love yourself—interesting because we hear the same language in the context of Marriage in Ephesians 5 when it says for the husband to love his wife as if he takes care of himself. But probably the most interesting verse is in Hebrews 13:2 which says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for in doing so some have unknowingly entertained angels."

Hospitality is fundamentally an act of kindness; Offering a cup of coffee with a friend; A place to stay when someone gets stranded or lending your skills and talents to help; a ride to work when their car is busted; or just some time getting to know them.

When my car finally got home it was hauled over to a friend and member of our church back home—to his house where he had a garage out back. He was a car guy and worked at the factory where my car was made. Seeing an opportunity to help he voluntarily found a slightly used engine for a very low cost and helped replace my old one. My only price for his labor was a piece of advice—"Matt, you let me work on your car and I'll promise not to get into the pulpit." He used his skills and connections to help a young seminary student get back on the road—gave my car several more years. I am still grateful to him for that.

With the fourth of July coming up this week consider the story of a very young 17 year old Lucy Floocker who left her family to marry Major Henry Knox. She left behind her family who remained faithful to the British during the revolutionary war—more like they disowned her. Lucy married young Henry, a soldier in the continental army. When the British surrounded Boston she and her husband escaped the city. It is said that Lucy concealed Henry's sword that he wore through the war, by having it quilted within the lining of her coat. If caught they would never have suspected her of having it.

Lucy loved Henry Knox and stayed as close to Henry as possible when he was camped but often during the war they were separated for many months at a time. Henry Knox eventually became a General and close friend of General George Washington who recognized his skills as a tactician. After the war Henry Knox became the first secretary of war for the United States. Lucy in that time became a leader within social circles and a friend of Mrs. Washington—the first lady at the time. Knox would also go on to found the first veterans association.

Eventually the Knox's retired to the estate once owned by her family and build mansion called the Montpelier in Maine at the head of the St. George River. They had ten children and enjoyed retirement. It was here that Henry's hospitality became legendary to his friends and even to squatters. Some of the letters of the time speak of the hospitality of Knox at his superb mansion. It was not unusual for him in summer, when visited by great numbers of his friends, to

kill an ox and twenty sheep every Monday morning, and to have a hundred beds made up daily in the house. He kept for his own use and that of his friends, twenty saddle horses and several pairs of carriage horses in his stables. This expensive style of living encroached greatly on his means. But Madam Knox, as she was called, held it all together with her usual powers of conversation, a great memory of people and details, and an instinct for society. She was described as a woman with much tact, quick and ready for sympathy, and good judgment, combined with great good-nature and a love for fun.” After her husband died, she remained charitable and continued her hospitality in spite of debt and the disrepair of the house in her 18 years of widowhood until she died in 1824.¹

What we learn from Lucy is her ability to meet and relate to people and make them feel welcome. In so doing people were naturally encouraged to return frequently. Yes, the generosity did help, but long after the noble days of war, long after the splendor faded, she kept up a spirit of welcome and remained consistent and is well-remembered because of her nature in this regard. The ones that make us feel most welcome are those who stand out most. By God’s grace may we be good hosts, make people feel welcome, and by our time together encourage a stranger to know Jesus in the way we love them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30

¹ <http://www.americanrevolution.org/women/women7.php>