

## SERMON

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In this short passage, Matthew records Jesus saying welcome 6 times and saying whomever 5 times. Christian communities should be marked by welcome, by hospitality. Why? Because God is hospitable, God welcomes all who come to him. And we as his people, as his children should take on his characteristics and be welcoming to everyone, who wishes to come to us. When we offer hospitality, a generous welcome to people we ourselves encounter Christ in and through them and they can encounter Christ in and through us. Again, and again in the Bible we see God coming to his people and meeting with them and seeing if that encounter through welcome brings blessing. In Genesis, 18, Abraham welcomes three strangers to his house.

These strangers are angels, and they end up blessing Abraham and Sarah, promising them to have a child. The story of Jericho when Rahab welcomes the two Israelite spies into her home. She welcomes them, she stores them overnight and she is delivered from the ensuing war. Her and all her family and relatives.

In the New Testament we know Mary is a wonderful example of a humble welcomer, here when she is told by Gabriel that she will conceive and give birth a son she openly welcomes God, not just into her life, and into her heart but into her womb, and the world is blessed through her.

In a way, Mary is the example to us all of what it means to open our lives up to God, to have him come into us and to live and dwell in and among us. What's really interesting is if you look at the parables, the teachings, the miracles of Jesus, often he's on a journey somewhere and he's being interrupted, interrupted by a stranger who he doesn't know or sometimes he is interrupting a stranger, and saying, can I come to your house? Often it is in these interactions that a miracle happens, a blessing happens, salvation is found, and people are restored and blessed. God's welcome is wide, his love is deep, he's generous to all who come to him and as Christians we should be welcoming, we are not called to be bouncers at the doors of our church, seeing if people are good enough, clean enough, 'moral' enough to come in.

We should be welcoming to all people. As we close this thought today I wonder if you yourself have welcomed Christ into your heart, maybe you're watching this, maybe you've just come across this YouTube channel for the first time, well can I ask you, or challenge you; Open your heart to Christ. Sometimes we get nervous that oh, if people knew my sin, if people, knew what I was like they wouldn't want to come in, as if we're embarrassed by the state of our house, like a messy house. I have two children and often our lounge is a mess, but we try and be a welcoming household.

God isn't going to stand at the door of your heart, knock and look in and think to himself, you know what, I am not going to come in, it's a little bit messy there. No, as Matthew records Jesus saying, whomever welcomes one of you, welcome me. Anyone is welcome. God's grace is sufficient for all of our needs. So, I want to encourage you today, open your heart up to God, be welcoming to him and know that he will come in, move in to your life and change you from the inside.

Bless you, know you're loved.