

Holy Hospitality in our Church Home

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A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Based on **Acts 16: 9-15**

Prayer: O God, You lead us to unexpected places, only to find ourselves exactly where we need to be. Guide us to offer hospitality and a warm welcome to strangers as well as friends. May our reflection this morning fill us with a light that will shine for others.
Amen

Have you ever found yourself in an unexpected place but realized that is exactly where you were meant to be? A year ago I was travelling with Kris in New Brunswick. We were having a delightful visit with Katie, our 3 year old grand-daughter. Now, she is almost four and still living on the other side of the country. When I returned to work, things had changed and my appointment ended. I always believe when a door closes God opens a window. Sometimes that takes a while! I hoped that God could still use me as a United Church minister but God has surprises. I never expected to be here on Gabriola,, serving an Anglican congregation as well as the United Church . Here I am and I am really happy to be here. God works in mysterious ways, but I do believe God and God's spirit guides us to where we need to be.

When I arrived I received a warm welcome. Maybe it is easier when everybody knows who I am !! I am grateful that individuals took time to come in and introduce themselves and talk about the church community.

How do you extend a welcome to other new-comers?

Almost every week visitors or people who have been away for a while, come to share in worship. What do you do to help them feel comfortable about being here? You can be proud of this place for worship. This building has been a worship space for over 100 years. Of course there have been some renovations and additions. With every change there are new people involved and new visions realized. The building is not what makes this a welcoming community of faith; it is the people who come here for worship that offer hospitality and a welcome.

What do you do to welcome visitors? First, think about which door is the church door? If you come up the ramp, how do you get into the church? If it is warm enough, let's keep the door open as a welcome. I think name-tags are very important. Sure you know everyone but be considerate. All of us have senior moments and name tags help. I believe one of the gifts of hospitality is recognizing people by name. Nametags help us to do that.

When you wear your nametag it is a gift you give to others.

Of course this is especially helpful to new people. So introduce yourself, learn their name and offer to make a name tag for them while they sign the guest book! Then EXPLAIN about the hymn book and show them the order of service. I realize our ushers do not seat

folk, but a new face deserves some personal attention. Come into the sanctuary with them and introduce them to someone they could sit with. During the passing of the peace, please make an effort to include everyone. Don't forget to invite them for coffee afterwards. Your Holy Hospitality makes a difference.

Do you realize that statistics have shown that the **first 6 minutes** is the most important time for connecting with seekers, people who are looking for a church family? It is not the powerful, inspiring music or the entertaining minister. The people in the congregation are the ones who reflect Christ's love and welcome.

Frequently I hear concerns about the people who have left either of the congregations. When you see someone that you haven't seen for a while, be sensitive about how they might be feeling. Your Holy Hospitality will be a key factor in rebuilding this congregation.

Holy hospitality does connect to the story of Lydia that we heard this morning. (*Acts 16: 9-15*). Paul had not expected to go to Macedonia but he had a vision directing him there. Lydia was with the women were worshipping together by the river and Paul and his touring group join them. Soon Paul is sharing the stories of Jesus. Lydia's spirit is so moved by Paul's message that she asks him to baptize her whole household. Then she welcomes Paul and his entourage into her home in Philippi. This holy hospitality supported Paul throughout his ministry. This is an example of how the early church formed communities of faith.

How did you become connected to this community of faith? Was it an unexpected surprise and you learned that God works in mysterious ways? Hopefully you received a warm welcome and you came to worship again. The more often you came the more you felt like you were part of this church family. This is not just another club or group that you belong to. I hope that you come to church for something more than just seeing friends, although that is important too! Unique relationships form in a faith community. Relationship, companionship, with the One who knows you better than you know yourself.

Are you on a faith journey, seeking to know more about God, the story of Jesus ministry and how that is relevant to your life now? Seekers are welcome here. Perhaps you have found yourself in an unexpected place but realized that is exactly where you were meant to be? God works in mysterious ways, but I do believe God and God's spirit guides us to where we need to be.

Now that you are here, try to be open to the presence of God in this sanctuary. Sometimes it is hard to be still and know God in this place, it is not just a matter of turning off the cell phones, often it is a matter of turning off all the head chatter when our heads are full of concerns or worries or our minds wonder to all those other things on the agenda. This is called *seeking some peace of mind!*

You may only hear one promise of hope that sustains you during the week.

Like the scripture from John (*John 14: 23-29*)

“Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit will be with us always.

(Not just when we come to church!)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

What happens when we truly experience that promise of peace, the light of God shining upon us and the breath of the Holy Spirit blowing through us?

Karoline Lewis wrote *“The primary reason for the gift of the Spirit is so that the disciples might experience the presence of Jesus in his absence...And one extraordinary gift of the incarnation is knowing a kind of companionship for which we all long and desperately need.”*

It is a relationship in which we are known and through being known we discover ourselves, we discover who we were created to be. Perhaps that is what drew the disciples to Jesus in the first place. In knowing Jesus, they came to know themselves. Resurrection promises a lifelong relationship with Jesus, and with our Creator. Companionship that is real and deep, companionship that brings us to life abundant as we discover our potential through discovering how completely we are loved.

This is also a message for us as we walk together in this ministry journey. Living the resurrection is about walking with Jesus as we companion with one another. “The need for companionship is as basic, perhaps, as the need for that which keeps us alive.”

The resurrection promises us companionship for life. May we be the type of friend that offers the hope and promise of resurrection living to one another.

All of us are on this faith journey guided by the Holy Spirit. We are here together whether we had expected it or not. We can be grateful for the opportunity to worship and work together towards an unknown future guided by the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God.