

Hospitality - Matthew 10: 40 – 11:1 – Sermon preached at Knox Church, Dunedin 29 June 2014 by Kerry Enright

He was a bit late for the service at Glide Memorial Methodist Church in San Francisco. The seats were mainly full, as they usually are at Glide Memorial. But the usher found one, in the middle of the pew. So the visitor squeezed his way down and took his place. The service was under way: the caftan clothed choir swaying at the front, the minister Cecil Williams in welcoming spirit, the banners like flags hanging from the sides of the Church with images of freedom and justice, a mix of a congregation, black and white, rich and poor, and he began to notice the people around him. On one side a plainly dressed man and on the other a woman. They came to the prayer of adoration and confession. He bowed his head and he unobtrusively looked more carefully. He noticed through a hole in the stockings a hairy leg, and looking up he noticed stubble on the chin. It was a man, dressed as a woman. It came to the passing of the peace and, he quickly noted, this was no cautious, distant, hand held out, polite passing of the peace. This was full embrace, a welcoming hug. So remembering the person on his left, he stood and quickly turned to the person on his right, to find they had themselves turned right. There was no choice. He turned to the left, and the man was waiting, nervously wondering what would happen. The visitor held out his arms, and the two of them embraced ... "the peace of Christ". There was a certain relaxing of the shoulders, a giving in, and as they sat down the visitor noticed he was wiping tears from his eyes. He wondered how long it had been since he had been hugged. The moment changed him. He remembered it for years to come. He told that story so it has gone around the world. Which is how I read it.

He was drawn into another way, another way of relating: no longer arm's length, no longer so cautious, no longer them and us ... they were one. Both were prophets; both received prophets. Both gave; both received. It was as one, one movement, one dance, as one with the way of Jesus, one with the life of God.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation told the story of two very different people becoming friends. They had got to know each other ... an asylum seeker from Iraq and a member of a knitting group from a town near Launceston in Tasmania ... the refugee had been sent to the local asylum centre along with others. They had come from a very hot place and Launceston is, well, cool. So women in the knitting group thought to knit beanies for the refugees. Not everyone was keen. And she was one. She had heard about the people smugglers, and she thought about how Muslims would not fit easily into the local community; a good community, where people knew each other, and got on well. But she enjoyed knitting, the other women seemed keen, so she joined in. The time came when they were hand over the beanies, and as she had knitted a few, she cautiously agreed to go, and she met this man ... a young man, a young man rather like her own son ... and nervously she began to talk with him ... and she learned how he had come to be there ... the only surviving member of his family, how hard he was finding it, but how much he appreciated the beanie. They became friends.

She was drawn into a bigger world, to seeing things from over there, as well as from over here. Both gave, both received. Both were prophets; both received prophets. Both knew more of the way of Jesus; both experienced more of the life of God.

An Australian School had developed a partnership with the village near Lelehudi, down on the southern coast of the main island of Papua New Guinea, out from Alotau. And once a year

Australian students, parents, teachers, visited the village, staying close by, interacting with the community, for about a week. The village was short of luxury: electricity by generator, the early hours of the night; running water, only just, to one tap in the middle of the village; a school, with few books. The chairs and the tables had seen better days. But the Australian School: arts, music, great playing fields, an impressive auditorium. When the Australian School was generously welcomed, it came time for him to speak. The Principal was a good man. He knew how important this relationship was for the Australians. He was struck by the difference in their circumstances. "We have so much and we can see how much your School needs", he said. One of the leading women stood and spoke in reply. She suggested that what they needed most were friends, a relationship, an exchange, a friendship.

Hospitality that changes both people; a relationship that affects both people; an exchange that leads both to a deeper, wider life, eternal life.

Pope Francis spoke for evangelism and against proselytism ... Why would I, he said, why would I just want to talk at someone? Why would I only want to persuade them to my view? Why would I not wish to listen to them, to learn from them as much as they might learn from me? Would we not both want to know a greater truth?

We are people, who are welcomed, and who welcome, who receive and who give, who always, in some way, depend on the generosity, the goodness of others. No matter how poor or wealthy we are. No matter how able or disabled we are. No matter how young or old we are. No matter how self-sufficient or dependent we imagine we are. We always rely on others.

It is of one, said Jesus, the receiving and the giving. Relying on others is of the essence of the Christian way, as much as is giving. It is one, one movement, one dance, one relationship within the life of God. The reward is eternal life, life plus, deeper life, life in God.

"Whoever welcomes you (and he is thinking of you) welcomes me", said Jesus, "and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

We are people who are welcomed and who welcome, people who receive and people who give. In recognising how we receive, we learn how to give, by grace, by Spirit, in the life of God.