

## Reflection for 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – Year A – Trinity 3 – Matthew 10: 40 – 42

**In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

In February I presented to the PCC, the parish church council, a year planner, detailing various activities and services taking place this year. Well, we all know what has happened to our plans since. Today is the day, when we were supposed to go to Manchester Cathedral, to witness Adam's ordination as a deacon. Then next Saturday I'd planned a Church Day Out that would have been a welcome party for Adam. Well, we know what's happened to that plan...

Welcome is important part of Christian faith. We just heard a reading from the Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus uses the word 'welcomes' 6 times. The context that Jesus speaks to is when he sends out his 12 disciples. They were not to have anything for their journey. They were to expect that their ministry would not bring peace but breakdown between family members. And now he tells them that ***"whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*** Simple but powerful words.

The word 'welcomes' that Jesus uses can also be the word 'receives' as we may notice from the Bible translations we have at home. Jesus is telling his disciples that their first-hand experience of God's welcoming for them through him should now become ministry of welcoming and receiving of others. Simple task, or is it?

Let me tell you what happened when I attended a church service the first time here in the UK. It was a shock because after the service, I was invited to stay for a cup of tea - no coffee those

times. Even bigger shock was that the priest shook my hand with me when I left. Because of this high level of welcome and receiving, I wasn't comfortable at all and so attended for a while 8 am service.

But I have another experience as well. When we lived outside of London for a while, we had a church down the road. On the day we attended, we weren't welcomed by the door. And after the service when we tried to introduce ourselves to the priest, he wasn't having it. No hand shake and no words of welcome. – As you guess, we never went back to that church.

That's not an experience one wishes to have. And I hope that not many of us have had that in the church. However, the reality is that we most likely have experienced something similar in the other aspects of our lives. I'm not talking only about skin colour, but age, gender, tribe, class, wealth and sexuality. We know those moments when we have not been welcomed or received. We know how those moments made us feel. – Worthless, rejected, diminished, shamed and so on.

Why is it so difficult to be welcoming? Why is it so difficult to be receiving others?

We seem to have a **welcoming** and **receiving** problem in our society. We only have to be aware of those 'hashtags', #metoo, #blacklivesmatter or #nhsclap. Sometimes the problem is hidden. Other times it can be seen and heard in broad daylight. But it isn't just a problem of the society. It is also a problem within the church, from the top to bottom, taking many shapes and forms, just like in the society at large.

But why is it so difficult to be welcoming? Why is it so difficult to be receiving others?

This is a real question to us to ponder now that we as a Church start to emerge from the Lockdown.

During this Lockdown the church has been more visible than perhaps ever before on the social media platforms. The church even crashed the Zoom one Sunday! But here's the thing, now that church has been more visible on the social media platforms and even on the TV. There are people out there who before didn't find the church relevant or didn't know what the "worship" looked like and stayed away because of it, but now have experienced it via social media and may want to come in.

If this is true and we see new faces on our church door, are we ready to welcome them and receive them without turning our backs on them? Does it matter who they are; their skin colour, their gender, their age, their tribe or class, their economic status, their sexuality? Are we going to welcome and receive some but not others because of these things?

But there is something deeper going on than welcoming and receiving someone to church. Jesus told his disciples that ***"whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*** When we welcome and receive people openly, we also help them to know God's love and compassion to them through Jesus Christ. We help them to know that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our salvation. That's what on stake with this 'welcoming and receiving' business. And we don't only talk about Sundays, we talk about the witness of our faith we give through church activities outside the church building, in our workplaces, schools, even when we do our shopping.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, ***"whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*** Amen.