

Mission Statement

WE WELCOME

I want to begin this sermon on WE WELCOME with a video clip.

It is a commercial produced by Dove beauty products.

Its target audience is our ladies.

It is so appropriate for Mother's Day.

It reminds us that how we feel about ourselves is not how others see us.

For that reason it is equally applicable to men.

Listen carefully and be ready to be moved.

PLAY VIDEO

OUR MISSION: "Because God has shown us Love and Forgiveness in Christ, WE WELCOME everyone to experience His Compassion."

It is our intent, and hopefully our passion, to be a welcoming congregation.

Our Mission Statement makes this bold declaration - We Welcome.

Because of how God has shown us love and forgiveness our response is welcome.

We are saying this is not an option for us.

We are serious about this.

We welcome everyone, no exceptions.

There are no qualifiers.

Neither appearance nor assets.

Neither age nor agility.

Neither gender nor jersey (as in hockey jersey).

Neither intellect nor interests.

Neither breeding nor bloodline.

None of these increase or reduce our welcome.

Every one of us has a part in extending this welcome.

But this desire could end up being an elusive dream.

To be a welcoming people will never be a reality until we learn something.

Before you can welcome others you have to experience something first.

You need to know what God sees when He looks at you.

God sees you differently than you see yourself.

He looks on you with immense and immeasurable love.

God loves you so much that He gave His only Son Jesus for you.

God literally sacrificed Himself for you.

He did that so Christ could do something amazing and miraculous in you.

God's desire has always been to welcome you in Christ.

Do you know for certain that God has welcomed you into His Kingdom?

That is where the welcome must begin.

The truth is we can genuinely love others only after we embrace God's love for us.

We can genuinely forgive others only after we embrace Jesus' forgiveness.

In the same way we can welcome others only after we embrace Christ's welcome.

That is Paul's conclusion in Romans 15:7.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you."

Think of what that meant in the context Paul wrote it.

Rome was diverse and inhospitable.

It was the capital of the gods.

Roman Emperors dominated and controlled life.

The city was populated with Gentiles.

Paul himself was a Roman citizen.

But Paul was also a Jew.

Jews despised Romans.

People of Rome despised and enslaved Jews.

There was no love lost on either side.

Affluence and poverty were meshed together.

But that meshing did not mean people were equals.

The have's and have not's were clearly defined.

In Rome the Christians were thrown to the lions for sport.

How could there be an atmosphere of welcome in that place?

People despised one another.

No love was lost in that context of hatred and distrust.

And Paul has the audacity to say welcome one another.

It would be like mixing oil and water.

Let's see how Paul reaches that conclusion.

I Paul sees Christ' EXAMPLE (vs. 3).

Jesus did not live to please Himself.

Paul is looking back at the life of Jesus.

The Psalmist, who Paul quoted, looked forward to the life of Jesus (Ps. 69).

They both saw how Jesus put others ahead of Himself.

He bore their reproaches.

Jesus launched Himself into the suffering of others.

Some of that suffering was physical.

Some suffered emotional abuse.

All were suffering religious abuse.

Some were having their character assassinated.

We understand the phrase defamation of character.

That is when someone else tries to ruin our reputation.

That is the reproach Jesus took for others.

He stood with those who faced all these abuses and insults.

The Message puts it this way.

"That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. 'I took on the troubles of the troubled,' is the way Scripture puts it." (Romans 15:3-6)

Why did Jesus do that?

David knew exactly why.

He knew the Messiah was consumed with passion for God's house.

The house of God wasn't buildings of stone and mortar.

The dwelling place of God is with His people.

Jesus is consumed with zeal for the people His Father loves.

Paul recognizes the greatest way to live is to follow Jesus' example.

"Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, 'How can I help?'" (Romans 15:1-2 The Message)

Doesn't that sound a lot like the life of a mother?

There is something else that brings Paul to his conclusion of inclusion.

II Paul sees the Holy Spirit's ENCOURAGEMENT (vs. 4)

This is an amazing vision that doesn't begin with the Holy Spirit.

His vision begins with the Scriptures.

Paul describes the Scriptures as steadfast and encouraging.

And he tells us why the Scriptures are steadfast and encouraging.

They are a reflection of their Author.

Paul describes God as steadfast and encouraging.

Paul says that God is constant and comforting.

Encouraging and comforting are two translations of paraklesis.

And that is the same root word on which the word comforter is built.

Jesus called His Spirit the Paraklete or Comforter.

The work of God's Holy Spirit is to be our Comforter.

God's Spirit is our Comforter and Encourager.

God's Spirit is steadfast and constant.

He is also enduring and hopeful.

When Paul sees the Scriptures' encouragement He sees the Spirit's presence.

It is no wonder the Scriptures encourage hope.

It is enabling the work of God to be done in our lives through His Holy Spirit.

We are involved in the work of God as we follow Scriptural instructions.

"God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!" (Romans 15:5-6 The Message)

Let's not miss the truth Paul is sharing.

As believers we must be filled and our affections cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

Only through the Holy Spirit's power can we live in harmony with each other.

We know unity as the body of believers only as God's Spirit indwells.

God's Spirit empowers us to love with perfect love.

He is the source of our Hope.

William Barclay says, "the Christian hope is not a cheap hope".

The Christian hope is not an immature hope.

The Christian hope sees the difficulties around us and keeps going.

George Frederic Watts drew a painting depicting hope.

Hope is portrayed as a woman sitting on a globe.

She is blindfolded, and bent over.

She is clutching a wooden lyre with only one string left intact.

She sits in a hunched position, with her head leaning towards the instrument.

She is listening to the faint music her fingers continue to orchestrate.

With the last remaining string she continues to play.

That is hope, listening for the faintest sound.

Hope continues even when there is little to work with.

Hope continues even when there is little impact or evidence of fruit.

Hope continues to make a difference amidst failure.

Doesn't that sound a lot like a mother too?

Paul could come to only one conclusion.

Jesus' EXAMPLE and the Spirit's ENCOURAGEMENT make us other-focused.

Jesus' EXAMPLE and the Spirit's ENCOURAGEMENT make us hope-filled people.

When we are other-focused and hope filled we become truly Christ-like.

Christ has welcomed us.

And so we welcome one another.

And this glorifies God.

The love we have for God becomes deeply intertwined with our love for others.

Our God is a welcoming God.

He is an inviting God.

He is the God who embraces.

There is always room for one more.

Welcome is a divine expression.

"Your God is gracious and kind and won't snub you—come back and he'll welcome you with open arms." (2 Chron. 30:9)

Deitrich Bonhoeffer said "To love is to welcome."

To love is to show radical hospitality.

When we are a welcoming people we are a godly people.

When we welcome we are an expression of God and His love for this world.

When we are enveloped in God's love we do not keep people at arm's length.

We do not resist letting them into our world because it isn't our world.
We are not selective nor do we hold a measuring stick at the door.

God loved us and welcomed us while we were yet sinners.

Let's never forget that as we serve God.

Has God welcomed you into His Kingdom?

Then welcoming others into His presence is not an option.

Because God has shown us love and forgiveness, WE WELCOME.

Closing Song Video - Think About His Love