

5 simple words

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me.

So much is being said. Because we all know, **not everyone is welcome**. Not everyone is deemed worthy of our time or leads us to set another place at the table.

Jesus wanted to send out his disciples well prepared because *Not everyone would be glad to see them coming*. They were not only strangers, they were strangers with a message reportedly from God, and it was a message they did not want to hear.

You know that message, it was taught in that sermon on the mount. Jesus was calling them to live as servants to one another, to forgive their enemies, to feed hungry strangers, to act with mercy and not revenge.

This is what the love of God is about: life and healing and forgiveness and acceptance for everyone.

Not just your family or favorites

Not just folks who are Jews like you, but Romans and Canannites and non-believers and Muslims and Mexicans

not just healthy and strong people but the blind, the lame, and the lepers.

Those disciples were calling the people back to a place where their first allegiance was to the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt and secured freedom for them

and Not to the government or the economy or some tradition

and NOT to systems which reward **some** while excluding, discarding, and crushing others.

Just like the prophets from day one, those disciples faced angry opposition to the suggestion that the status quo was not acceptable to God, and those who called themselves children of God needed to make some changes. Yup! They beheaded John the Baptist, and crucified Jesus.

So we should not be surprised when prophets come into our midst to tell us that systems that crush some and give advantage to others need to come to an end;

that healing needs to be available to all people,  
that the life God has poured into black and brown skins is as precious to  
God as is yours and mine and all of our neighbors.....  
well, we are not surprised that those prophets are not welcomed either.

Because **we all know that not everyone is welcome.**

So I have some hard questions for us.

How did we, the followers of Jesus, get to a place where we close our ears to  
the fact that a greater percentage of people of color are imprisoned in America  
than were ever imprisoned under apartheid in the Rep of South Africa?

How did we, the followers of Jesus, get to the place where the shooting death by  
an off-duty police officer of an innocent man who pulled over to change a flat tire  
is not even considered unusual?

How did we, the followers of Jesus, get to the place where we ignore that the  
larger percentage of Covid deaths were among people of African descent who  
use hospitals which have been underfunded for years?

How did we, the Lutheran followers of Jesus, get to the place where we are the  
whitest denomination in all of America?

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*Have we lulled ourselves* into complacency by taking comfort in the old familiar  
Bible stories and ignoring Jesus' call to justice?

Have we decided that baptism wasn't the beginning of our transformation into  
the likeness of Jesus, but rather was a ticket to a happy life in the great beyond?

Have we forgotten that Jesus sat at table with a tax collector, a leper, and  
Judas?

Have we convinced ourselves that we are 'good people' with sufficient basic  
righteousness and we have done all the work we need to do in this lifetime?

How hard are we willing to work – in the world and in ourselves – to bring justice and peace to this land? For without justice, there can be no peace. Are we unable to hear that we are wrong, and in need of confession and radical change?

Or will we decide it is all too much and comfort ourselves by singing Great is thy Faithfulness?

All of this is a message I don't want to hear; I don't want to feel the guilt of knowing I am complicit in any number of systems that make my life better and my black sisters' lives more difficult. Did you know that black women suffer childbirth related death at 4 times the rate of white women? Today! In America!

I truly do not know anything....but this one thing: if the God who has deigned to love me loves them, if the Jesus who died for me, died for them,  
then they are my brothers and sisters.

I know I need to start in deep prayer – prayers of confession, prayers of intercession for those who face injustice, prayers for a nation who has avoided facing our own truths. I need to take first steps toward dismantling my own biases, and I am starting by educating myself, and then making myself stick it out for the uncomfortable work of being transformed.

In the name of the crucified and risen one, our Lord Jesus Christ, I pray you begin this journey as well. Perhaps we can journey together. For Jesus tells us: the one who welcomes the prophet, shall receive the prophet's reward: they shall know God. Dear Lord, may it be so. Amen