

## **One City One Message, Vancouver June 11, 2017**

### **Two bible studies on welcoming the stranger for home groups**

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#### **Study 1. Welcoming the Stranger**

*Resources: a large piece of paper and a marker. Have a copy of the 'Trinitarian prayer' (below) for each person to read (or, write it out on a large piece of paper, beforehand?).*

**Part 1, Check-in:** Share a story where you have received the gift of friendship from someone, when you really needed it.

#### **Part 2, Introduction.** Read out loud:

The same sermon theme is being preached in over one-hundred-and-fifty Vancouver churches on Sunday June 11, this year. Our theme: welcoming the stranger. Together, we are sending a unified message to the city, a vision of the kingdom: the radical welcome of God, in Christ.

The theme of welcoming the stranger is timely: survey-based research by the Vancouver Foundation shows that Vancouverites are experiencing a crisis of social isolation, a corrosion of care that results in a silo mentality. This is timely, too, as we are living in a period of unprecedented global displacement, where over 65 million people around the world have been forced from home.

'Welcoming the stranger' takes us to the very heart of Christian identity and mission. Our shared initiative takes seriously that we are a people called to announce the good news that in Christ, crucified and risen, God is at last reconciling all of the creation—forgiving sin, reconciling humanity to God, and reconciling humanity with one another. But, it's not too helpful just to say it. This good news will only be believed when it is embodied by a community that is living it. Through our shared life, lived gratefully before the Lord, others too will come to know the radical welcome of God, in Christ.

#### Activity

Consider these questions in silence (someone reads these questions aloud, one by one, with a brief pause between each for silent reflection):

What does it feel like when someone pauses and forms a friendship with you?

What does it feel like to 'waste time' with another person?

Do you find it easier to help someone in practical ways, or to befriend someone?

What would it feel like to be constantly asking for help from someone?

What would it feel like for you to be helped in some way by a vulnerable person who lives on the street?

You are invited to briefly share your response to one of these questions (20 seconds each).

#### **Part 3, Scripture Reading: Jesus eats with Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10**

Read this text twice out loud

Question: As we read, try to identify a specific phrase or image that resonates with you. Can you share it and tell the group why it seems important? (less than 1 minute each)

#### **Part 4, Going Deeper with the Text:**

Questions for discussion:

- What was Zaccheaus' emotional response to Jesus' welcome? (vs 6)
- What was the response of the onlookers? (vs 7)
- Who was welcoming who?
- Re-read vs 8-10. What has happened here?
- What did Jesus do and say that led to Zaccheaus' response?

New Testament scholars have said that Jesus 'ate his way through the gospels!' In Luke's gospel, Jesus does more eating than he does teaching! Also, Jesus eats with all of the 'wrong' people:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1-2)

Question: In the first century, meals were a means of including and excluding people. People were knit together as kindred as they shared a meal. What is the significance of Luke 15:1-2 for our understanding of Jesus' life and ministry?

#### **Part 5, Meaning for Today:**

**Brainstorm** some creative examples that you are aware of where Christ followers have faithfully reflected the radical welcome of Christ. These may be individuals, a church community, or another group. What was the impact?

**Imagine:** each person shares one idea of what it could look like for your church to be transformed by this story.

#### **Part 6, Personal Commitments and Prayer:**

Share how this scripture speaks into your heart about personal priorities and the witness of your church.

#### Zoom prayer

You might like to do this as a group: Zoom out and think of something happening in the world relating to refugees that you would like to pray for. Now, zoom in and imagine one person living in that situation. Imagine what it may be like for that person and what they would be hoping that people would be praying for. Pray a prayer to God based on what you have imagined in your zooming in.

Pray together out loud this Trinitarian prayer at the end of both of these studies.

**All:** Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth:

Set up your kingdom in our midst.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God:

Have mercy on me, a sinner.

Holy Spirit, breath of the living God:

Renew us and all the world. Amen.

## Study 2. Loving the Stranger: Refugees

*Resources: a large piece of paper and a marker. Have a copy of the 'Trinitarian prayer' for each person to read.*

**Part 1, Check-in:** Share with one another: where have you experienced welcome, this week?

### **Part 2, Introduction:**

Refugee-claimants arriving at Vancouver airport are often totally disorientated. Many people pay a smuggler without knowing where they are headed for. Refugee-claimants get off the aircraft only to discover that they are in Vancouver. Most are held at YVR airport for 48 hours, which is often re-traumatizing, for many people already have a fear of government. In detention, families are often split-up, adding to their fear. When they are released from detention, many refugee claimants have nowhere to live, ending up on the street and in shelters.

Imagination exercise: Imagine that a third world-war breaks out, and that as a part of the global conflict Canada is invaded by another nation from the sea. Imagine that you are fleeing the conflict by foot across the border into the USA, with your children, with no food and very few belongings.

Here are two questions about this scenario for you to answer out loud: A. What is your greatest fear as you cross the border into the U.S.? B. What is one thing that you would really like encounter as you cross into the U.S.

### **Part 3, Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 10:15-19**

In order to explore welcoming the refugee, we will study a text in Deuteronomy that called God's ancient people, Israel, to re-think how they response to displaced people.

Read twice, Deuteronomy 10:15-19. As you read, try to identify a specific phrase or image that resonates with you. Can you share it and tell the group why it seems important?

### **Part 4, Going Deeper with the Text:**

The word that most closely corresponds to our modern notion of 'refugee' in the Old Testament is (depending on the translation) *stranger*, *alien*, and *sojourner*. The 'stranger' is someone who is displaced and vulnerable. Strangers have lost their homeland and their kindred. These people lack the resources to survive on their own. They are dependent upon the generosity of the Israelites among whom they hope to live. The book of Deuteronomy is especially concerned to protect such displaced people, referring to the stranger no less than 22 times! In ancient times, strangers were commonly exploited as cheap labour or even enslaved. Deuteronomy 10:18-19 offers an alternative model for responding to displaced people. As you answer these

questions, imagine that you are an ancient Israelite farmer, living in a small village.

- What words are repeated in this text?
- Write down the three uses of the word 'love' in this text (perhaps on a large piece of paper for the whole group).
- The word 'love' does a lot of 'work' in this passage! What do these three interrelated uses of 'love' tell us about the command to "love the stranger"?
- 'Love' in this passage means a covenant commitment. The same word is used for treaties between kings. What might the implications be of 'love' as a covenant commitment for ancient Israel's engagement with displaced people?

### **Part 5, Meaning for Today:**

Asylum-seekers arrive in Canada having experienced tremendous loss. Christ followers can offer newcomers the gift of friendship and a sense of family. It is a precious gift of time, to just be there for the person.

Questions:

- What would it look like for your worshipping community to live into Deuteronomy's vision for enfolding the stranger?
- Share with one another what you know about church sponsorship of refugees.
- Two Christian agencies in Vancouver are seeking churches who are willing assist refugees to resettle (this is different from sponsorship): Kinbrace and Journey Home
- What might this experience be like for your community?

### **Part 6, Personal Commitments and Prayer:**

Share how the passage that we have studied speaks into your heart about your own personal priorities and also the witness of the congregation.

Take a minute in silence to think of an aspect of our discussion that they would like to bring before the Lord. Then, have a time of prayer, where people are invited to pray out loud. You could pray in pairs or as a whole group.

Pray together out loud the Trinitarian prayer that was printed out with the first bible study.