

# Welcome

June 29, 2008  
Edwards (Knox) United Church  
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 10:40-42

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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I am a people watcher. When I sit in Tim's I watch the interactions. Waiting at airports is also revealing about human interaction. And this year's Jazz festival, which by the way has been great, watching tells much about how we interact with others.

At airports, as we wait for the luggage, some crowd up to the luggage belt. Some stand back. Those who stand back can see the luggage come down and then you move in. Others push to the front and often miss because they are too close. Standing back gives one a larger view.

Those waiting for passengers have all sorts of looks on their face. And as they see those they are waiting for, their face lights up and arms open wide. Conversations happen, smiles all around, and then the luggage is found. Others hold back though, and grab the luggage and move off quickly. How we encounter and welcome one another tells us much about who we are.

Sitting at the Jazz festival people get their spot, set up their chairs. Some spread out, taking a lot of space. Others make contact, help by look and word. Then some of us wait for our friends. Worry about the space taken. Will they come? The crowd grows. Ah there they are. A wave. A smile. A welcome and we settle in - some of us quiet because the music has begun. We serve the music and respect the artists. Now there are some who welcome their friends by conversation, as if they are the only ones there. Those around shift. In whose name are we here? As the evening proceeds, and the music surrounds us, we feel the connection even though no words are said. The music welcomes us and moves us and sends us home feeling as one. Wow is said and nods are made.

The Herbie Hancock group plays and sings, *When Love comes to Town*. The crowd rises and moves and yells. He says we ought to play it again and yes roars back. Love has come to town - in the name of love. Our reality has been changed. A sense of well being is created by the music.

When love comes to town I'm gonna jump on that train  
When love comes to town I'm gonna catch that flame  
Maybe I was wrong to ever let you down  
But I did what I did before love came to town (U2)

We have in Matthew early instructions for the church. Love has come to town and now the community is to go out in the name of love.

On [www.wondercafe.ca](http://www.wondercafe.ca) there has been a discussion of the meaning of community. One of the current trends in the church today is for us to describe ourselves as "warm and welcoming." While it may say the door is open, it doesn't stand as the ultimate indication of what is being shared inside the door. Yes warm and welcoming is important. Many communities do that and yes there is more to be said about us.

The question is who do we serve? In whose name do we come? For me the feeling of the Jazz festival gives a hint. We notice that the players serve the music. Those who listen serve the music. There is a call and response, among the players and then with those of us who listen. Our bodies move. The feeling created is more than warm and welcoming. There is an element of transformation going on. Old standards have new meaning. We have heard this before but we hear something different in it. I had not heard that phrase before and now the old standard is clearer.

There is a functionality or a pragmatics of any event. As well, there is a mission embedded in all human activity. Some missions are self serving. Some are to make us feel good. Some events are ends in themselves. They do what they set out to do. A room is prepared for a party. It is over and the symbols disappear for they have done what they needed to do - create a festive space. There was a time of being warm and welcoming.

Our rationale as a church - our mission - includes these human needs of inclusion. However, the mission of the church begins in inclusion of warm welcomes and goes beyond. We gather to be formed in the name of love. The church rehearses the fact that love has come to town. Love of God is here, in this moment, in this action. We formed by it, live out of it. It defines mission that goes beyond comfort and support.

In the background of our texts is the idea that the welcome of the messenger is to welcome the one who sent the message. You are to receive the king's messenger as if it was the king. This means the messenger has authority. Jesus sends out and those sent out represent Jesus. Just as Jesus represented God, so do those sent out.

So to welcome is to welcome the activity of God. Our mission begins in the fact that love has come to town. Now we represent that love.

The mission of the church is twofold. It is to create an identity of welcome. To be formed around love. This is what my friend Brad Morrison calls inreach. We gather to serve the creation of an identity based in the love of God.

The second is outreach. Note how the simplest thing, like a cup of water, is a sign of hospitality. We move our chairs to give one another more room. It begins to rain and the person behind helps move the plastic over our backs. Awareness.

In watching, though, I note that some people push in, push others out. Aware only of their needs. What is the difference in attitude? Of course I cannot read their mind. However, what I do know is habit is built in. When we have a limited vision, of seeing the world only out of self interest we exhibit this by how we encounter others.

The practice of faith is to create within us the habit of hospitality, to treat this world and others as brothers and sisters, no, more than that, as friends. The mission of the church is to ingrain in us the habit of the heart of love shared, in big and little ways. We know love has come to town, we welcome it our living. We know that love is continuing to come to town, so we live out of it. We open our eyes to the needs around us and we respond. For we have been welcomed and named, now we welcome and in doing so God is known.

One of the aspects of this is when we are asked why? We can say we do it in the name of God. We are those who bring the message that God has come to town.

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