

welcome, takes a lot more thought! But seeing parents gradually move from the wall in the hallway, into the Fellowship Hall for social time, and then into our faith community on a Monday night or Sunday morning, is proof that we are making strides at being a welcoming community.

As we invite and welcome new friends to church, we need to remember to speak the language that Jesus did. A language of actions and deeds that point others in the direction of a loving God. It's so attractional! It transcends generations. It's the chatter in the streets about the Welcome Revolutionary. The one that changed everything, redefining the way we love and welcome others. Sharing the message; for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

So, don't be a Jesus fan. Be a Jesus follower. Be a follower that leads. Be a follower that leads others right to Jesus. Redefine what it means to welcome your friends and neighbours in Jesus' name. Speak to the next generation in their own language. Pick them up and tell them that they're important. Step off the predictable path to reach someone and tell them they are loved. Be bold and reach out to the lost to extend a welcome invitation.

Afterall, it is our call as the church to be on a mission as gracious welcomers in Jesus' name. It is evident that this congregation is seeking a revolutionary welcome effort! This newly renovated sanctuary, the creation of new programs, and new staff positions will

allow you to welcome, far and wide, beyond the "usual crowd." Just how big will you allow Jesus to inspire the Welcome of the people of Selby United Church? What will the chatter in our community be about this place? It's alive! It's vibrant! It's reaching people in new ways! It's so welcoming! It's where I went from Jesus Fan to Jesus Follower!

Jesus preached a message that changed and continues to change the world. Love God and Love Others. Jesus didn't just say the words. He led by example...loving and welcoming everyone. A love so deep that he allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross to welcome you into a personal relationship with God, and ultimately find an eternal place in heaven.

Yes, my heart belongs to my Saviour, and I will continue to follow and be a part of his revolutionary welcome team.

Amen.

## ***“Welcome Revolutionary”***

*September 17th, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Romans 15:7-9*  
*By Rebecca Stacey*

Over the last 10 years my family has attended Trinity United Church. Trinity has been in a time of discernment, acknowledging that our world is rapidly changing and that we need to consider our attempts to be relevant and welcoming amid this change. Using Romans 15:7 “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God,” to keep us rooted in faith, we are exploring new ministry to welcome all generations.

Okay, now that you know a little bit about me, I'd like to get to know you. Let's see, are there any Blue Jay fans at church today? Ok, ok. How about the Leaf's? Where are the Leaf Fans? Do I dare ask if there are Canadians fans in the crowd? Alright, how about a different avenue, are the social media fans here, those of you that follow your favs on Pinterest, Facebook, and Instagram? Okay, lots of different fans with us today!

Many years ago, I read a book called “Not a Fan.” The author caught my attention with his opening statement, that he is not a Jesus fan [pause]. Rather he claimed to be a Jesus follower. He went on to say that fans admire the work, wear the t-shirts, and hop on the bandwagons. Followers are different. Followers step up. (As a side note, this book was written before the social media boom! Being a fan and following someone today requires just a simple click). But being an authentic follower of Jesus means picking up your cross every day and following Him. Following his lead and not just admiring his work.

As I began to organize my thoughts for today, I realized that in my role in Trinity's

outreach ministries, that we are initially inviting people to be fans of Jesus, hoping, and praying that they will seek more. We strive to build Christian community and follow Jesus' lead in our welcome attempts!

Afterall, Jesus was a welcome revolutionary, a rebel if you will! He broke the social norms of his day to welcome everyone! This current generation celebrates acceptance. Jesus literally wrote the book on what it means to accept others, and to welcome everyone. As we consider what it means to be a welcoming congregation to this new generation, looking to Jesus as our guide and inspiration is the obvious source.

Let's begin with “The Children.”

### **Matthew 19:13-15 – To Enter God's Kingdom**

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: “Let the children alone, don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these.”

In Jesus' time children didn't have the same societal value that they have today. They were neither seen nor heard. They were raised in homes that consisted of their extended families. The women often lived in one section of the home, and the men lived in another room. The children roamed freely between the two areas and were often used by the adults to discover what was going on in the other rooms. So, when the disciples shoo the children away from Jesus, it was not just about giving Jesus some respect as a teacher or some quiet time – it was to protect him from potential

gossip. One scholar claims that Jesus welcomes the children to show that he has no secrets. He was authentic, trustworthy, and did not try to hide his private life.” Further in this moment, Jesus clarified that God’s kingdom belongs to everyone, especially those (like children) that are fully reliant.

Given my current work with kids, I can’t help but think of the epic superhero status of Jesus in this story. Perhaps some had heard of Jesus and were hoping for a glimpse, others for a blessing. The anticipation must have been so high and then dashed so quickly by the disciples. But then, Jesus said it was “ok.” Jesus changed the social rules for the kids. He greeted and welcomed them. He picked them up, put them on his knee, and announced to everyone that they mattered.

Can you imagine the chatter later when the children were playing? “Jesus spoke to me! Jesus picked me up! Jesus told the adults that I’m important! Jesus said the Kingdom of God belongs to children.” Those are the voices of the children that experienced Jesus’ welcome. Those are the voices going from fans to followers. I think Jesus knew that the children would be part of telling the story to the next generation. After his crucifixion, those children would be among those hearing the story of his resurrection and remembering, “yeah, there was something different about him. That’s the Jesus that died for me. That’s the Jesus I want to tell my kids about... That’s the Jesus that taught me to love and welcome everyone.” Jesus was a Welcome Revolutionary.

#### **The Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42)**

I’m sure that many of you are familiar with the story of the woman at the well. Jesus and his disciples are travelling from Judea to Galilee. During this time,

there were two main routes of travel, both intentionally bypassing Samaria. As you may know, the Jewish people and the Samaritan people didn’t associate. But the shortest route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria, and Jesus and had his reasons for seeking this shortcut.

While the disciples headed into the city for food, Jesus stayed at the well. The story notes that it was midday when a Samaritan woman approached. Water gathering was traditionally a morning chore (and social time) for the women in the community. This woman, alone at midday, leads us to believe that she wasn’t in the same social circle as the other women. Jesus speaks first, asking for her to draw him some water. Confused she said, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9)

In response, Jesus says, “if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

As the conversation progresses, she realizes that Jesus must be a prophet, as he knows so much about her. They speak of the one that is to come, and Jesus confirms his deity to her. In this moment we witness the Samaritan woman going from fan to follower. As the disciples return, she leaves them (and her water jug – no longer relying on well water) to tell her community about Jesus.

You see, no longer fearing judgement from her peers, she proclaimed, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” 30.

The passage goes onto to say that Jesus spent two more days with the Samaritans at their request. It’s likely the disciples thought that this was crazy! Most

wouldn’t have chosen to travel this way, let alone spend a day or two! Jesus challenged the disciples to extend their reach to share God’s love with everyone.

Imagine the chatter in the city. “Did you meet Jesus? Did you hear what he had to say? He has changed my life! I want to tell everyone about him! Jesus invites and welcomes everyone!” Jesus was a Welcome Revolutionary.

#### **Zacchaeus**

Thinking back to my childhood, I clearly remember the story of Zacchaeus climbing the tree, because he was too short to see Jesus. As I read the story now, I can see Jesus – Welcome Revolutionary at work, once again breaking down stereotypes and welcoming everyone.

Chief Tax Collectors in Jesus’ time were Jewish individuals working for the Roman Empire. They were seen as sinful, traitors to the Jewish community. They were the lowest of the low. Jesus knew this. Of course, he did! But he wouldn’t have been the Welcome Revolutionary if he didn’t shake things up and make people take notice.

1So [Zacchaeus] ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”

We get a glimpse of the talk around town... 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus, very aware of the criticism of those around him, and very much in awe of Jesus, quickly goes from Jesus Fan to Jesus Follower.

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded

anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” 9 Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 1For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Jesus made his mission abundantly clear; he came to welcome and to save the lost. Jesus fans will applaud and appreciate this dinner party. Jesus followers will go out of their comfort zone to also welcome the lost, to share their faith and proclaim the good news.

As I reflect on the story, I think, perhaps beyond the grumbling and complaining there was hope in the chatter. “Is Jesus staying with Zacchaeus? Jesus is staying with Zacchaeus. Wow, Jesus has time for everyone. If Jesus welcomes Zacchaeus, then there’s hope for me too.” Jesus was a Welcome Revolutionary.

#### **Summary**

In three stories we have experienced Jesus at work – welcoming everyone and turning social norms upside down, children are welcomed and valued, geography, race, ethnicity, gender, marital and social status ignored. Even traitors are given a place of honour. The response is worth noting too! Ordinary people, changed by Jesus’ welcome, going on to be a part of the story that changed history, to follow him to a new way of life!

At Trinity’s KIDS Club and our new Monday Night Worship Services, we find some of our best opportunities to welcome in Jesus’ name. One of my favourite bits of feedback came from a new dad that said to my husband, “this isn’t the church experience that I remember as a kid.” Translation: He was thrilled to see his kids exploring their faith in a way that was modern and fun. Making it fun for the kids is relatively easy, but making the parents feel