

Calling the Stranger “Friend”

THEME: We are all one. Praying for the gift to live this truth.

*SETTING: Circle of chairs. Plain white cloth on a center table.
Small pieces of colored cloth in a basket with pins.*

Opening

Song “All Are Welcome” by **Marty Haugen**, verse 1:

*Let us build a house
where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen,
serve and teach,
And live the Word they’ve known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God’s face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger;
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

(Pause for silent reflection.)

Repeat Refrain
*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Listening to Stories of Welcoming

Reading 1 *Genesis 18:2-5*
(Abraham’s Visitors)

Looking up, he (Abraham) saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said; “Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. Let me bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.”



Sing Refrain
All are welcome...

Reading 2 *1 Kings 17:10-15*

(Elijah and the Widow)

As he (Elijah) arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, “Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink.” She left to get it, and he called out after her, “Please bring along a bit of bread.” “As the Lord, your God lives,” she answered, “I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.”

“Do not be afraid,” Elijah said to her. “Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and for your son.”...She left and did as Elijah said.

Sing Refrain
All are welcome...

Reading 3 *Luke 19: 5-7*

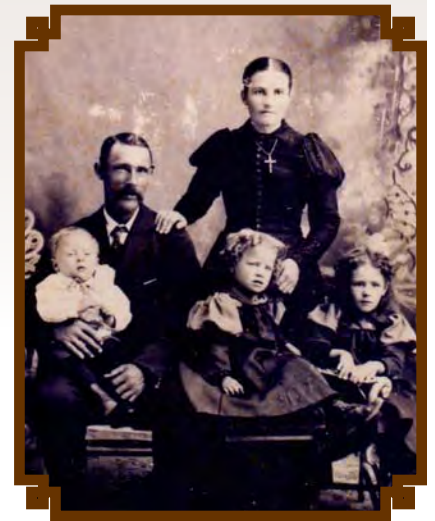
(Zacchaeus’ Welcome)

When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.”

Sing Refrain
All are welcome...

Reading 4 *Letter of U.S. Immigrant*
(October 18, 1897, by Gertrude Reynders)

The people say it is not so good here but the times are getting better, for to-



day they are paying twenty-five to fifty cents an hour for there is a shortage of men. But in the winter there is no work here, that is why they go to the woods.

But it is not so bad as they say in Holland, that if they only could, they would be waiting by the sea to go back to Holland. That is not so, for everyone eats good here and I have not seen a single beggar at the door... In Holland, it has the name of being bad for religion here, but we can be just as good here as in Holland... Here all kinds of people live among each other, white, black, yellow, Jews, Lutherans, Indians, and maybe many more.

Sing Refrain
All are welcome...

Reading 5 *A Modern Day Story*
(Luan’s Story: Her Mother’s Sacrifice)

That my mother sacrificed for her children is an understatement. My family emigrated from China to America when I was three. Many years later, when my family was in the process of applying for green cards through my dad’s employer, he divorced my mom. No longer “qualified” to remain in the U.S., as she was no longer part of our family in the eyes of the government, my mom had to move back to China, or stay in the States “illegally.” Would she mother me from across an ocean or remain without papers here so she could be present throughout my growing-up years?

From a mother's perspective, the answer was clear. Her child had grown up in America. The opportunity for me to live here was the driving force behind her leaving behind her homeland and old life in the first place. Would any mother not stay to see her daughter through adolescence to adulthood and support her in living out her dreams in a new country?

My mother stayed in the U.S. and ended up starting her own Chinese restaurant, where she created jobs for citizens. She married my stepdad and they have two young children who are U.S. citizens. My stepdad came into the country undocumented in the first place, and his immigration situation is a whole other story. In 2008, after they spent nearly 10 years of building a life

together in America, the Department of Homeland Security abruptly arrived at their door one morning and detained my stepdad, leaving my mother to run the family restaurant and caring for their children.

They both had deportation orders.



Today, my stepdad has been deported back to China, after spending nine months in an immigration jail. My mother is still here, because she clings tenaciously to the dream to raise her two young children in America and give them the same opportunities that I had. She has been waiting 15 months for a court decision on her appeal to reopen her immigration case.

Sing Refrain
All are welcome...

(Pause for silent reflection on the readings.)

Sharing

Leader *Invite participants to share:*

- When have you experienced being welcomed as a stranger? What was this like?
- When have you been the one who welcomed a stranger? What was this like?
- What stories have you heard of the welcoming of the immigrants in our society today? Of fear and rejection of the stranger? What changes are needed for me/for our culture to be truly a welcoming person/place for the stranger?

Leader *Let us listen to an ancient prayer:*

Reading 6

I see no stranger, I see no enemy
Wherever I look, God is all I see

I don't think of us and them
No one do I hate or condemn
I see God's image – each one a friend.

Of any religion, caste or race
All I see is God's shining face
His smiling face, His gracious face.

Accept as beautiful all His design
I learnt this truth in sangat divine

One Word resounds in me and you
Waheguru ... Waheguru ...
In him, in her, in me and you
Waheguru ... Waheguru ...

Beholding in every being His light
I bloom like a flower
in joy and delight.

adi granth - guru arjun dev ji (World Prayers)

Leader Each of us is a stranger in some way, in some place in this world. We each bring our own special gift which contributes to the whole of God's design. To symbolize this, I invite each of you to choose

one cloth patch from the table that speaks of your gift. Select a spot to pin your patch on the white cloth. Let us create a design that brings our uniqueness into one whole.

Closing

All *When the design is finished, conclude with the prayer:*

Dear and beloved stranger,
Please eat this food with us
that we may all be nourished.
Please share this walk with us
that we may all know nature's peace.
Please rest in this warm house
that we may come to know each other.
Please sleep under these soft blankets
that we may all know safety.
Please pray this prayer
that all our names of God
may guide us on.

kything - christina baldwin (World Prayers)

Song "All Are Welcome" by Marty Haugen, verse 5:

*Let us build a house
where all are named their songs
and visions heard
And love and treasured,
taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let the house proclaim
from floor to rafter,
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*



Acknowledgments

Photo shared by [Mary John VanderLoop, OSM](#); used with permission.
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