

A TIME FOR GREETINGS

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One of the things we have lost during this season of COVID-19 is the opportunity to meet and greet freely. When God created us, he designed us for attachment – both to Him and to others. In response, humans have developed many different greeting rituals. Some folks embrace each other when they meet, while others shake hands. In different parts of the world, people kiss each other freely. Here in Alberta, we are more likely to receive a subtle wave from the driver of a passing pickup or, if on a motorcycle, perhaps a “peace” sign. Whatever our greeting rituals were, COVID-19 has changed everything. These days, we talk mostly about contact tracing, social distancing, and personal protective equipment. We can forget that it was not always so.

Please read Luke 1:39-55

This wonderful account of God coming to us again, is filled with greetings. Mary had been earlier greeted by the angel, Gabriel, with the good news that she would be the mother of Jesus. She sets out to visit her aged aunt Elizabeth. It turns out that Gabriel had made another visit to Uncle Zechariah to announce the good news that he and Elizabeth would be having their own long-awaited first child.

When Mary arrives and greets her aunt, even Elizabeth’s unborn child gets involved and dances inside her with ecstatic joy. Something incredibly special is going on here between the Creator and His favoured creations. Whether through angels, relatives, or unborn children God is reaching out to meet and greet His children who He loves beyond measure.

What is our picture of the God who reaches out to us? Is He the God who says, “Let the children come to me...?” Is He the One who stands at the door and knocks? Do we delight in Him and He delights in us? Or do we picture God as someone who is rather stern and mostly disapproving? What kind of face do we expect when we finally get to meet Him in heaven? Is it the judgemental face of a father who has waited for a child to finally get home well after curfew? Does He have a list? Or will we see the face of a long-waiting parent who will run, embrace, and kiss us when we finally come home?

In my work with students over the years, I have often spoken with kids who are trying very hard to get into a group where they are not welcome. Too often this causes them to try to be someone they are not, in order to gain access to something they think they need. My advice, probably gained from someone I no longer remember, was “If you walk into a room and no one’s eyes light up, find another room.”

The God of advent takes delight in His people. His eyes light up when He sees us. When He meets us, He really greets us. The God on the other side of the door wants to come in and eat with us, but that can only happen if we hear His voice and let Him in.

Over the years, I have come to understand that God created us primarily for relationship. Obedience and duty are important, but God wants my heart more than my activity. It is never too late to take up walking and talking with Someone who loves me and believes in me. I trust that we will allow the God of advent to really meet and greet us during this season.