



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Welcome

(April 2023 | Volume 2, Issue 8)

It's uncanny how well calibrated we humans can be in knowing whether or not we are truly welcome in any given situation. From the snooty attitude of a salesclerk or the cold shoulder of a relative, we can very often suss out that we are not being genuinely welcomed in a way we might hope. In contrast, simple and sometimes subtle gestures can convey with absolute clarity that people are, indeed, glad that we have come. These markers can be unmistakable.

This month, we take up the theme of Welcome. It's a word that can function as various parts of speech, taking on a range of meanings. The word welcome can be a noun, a verb, or adjective. Or, of course, an exclamation: "Welcome!" In its various definitions, it can convey invitation and hospitality, belonging and acceptance.

Over the coming weeks and in conversation with the members of your Journey Group, explore whatever meanings have deep relevance for you. My hope is that through the course of these conversations, we might all recognize the degree to which intention undergirds most every use of the word. And that we might all bring that intention to creating—around us and within us—a much more welcoming world.

May it be so.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



Photo by Maarten Van-Den-Heuvel on Unsplash

1. When and where and how have you felt truly welcome in your life? What made that feeling so?
2. When and where and how have you extended true welcome to others in your life? Was that sense of welcome received by others as you hoped?
3. When have you not felt welcome, and what contributed to that feeling?
4. Is there a place in your life today that you want to make more welcoming?
5. Is there a place within yourself where you hope to more fully welcome something or someone?
6. If not one of these questions, what is your question about “welcome” for this month?

For Inspiration

Hospitality is making guests feel at home even if you wish they were.

- Donald Coggan (and attributed to many other authors)

Radical hospitality. Radical means “out of the ordinary,” “revolutionary,” even. So what would it mean to receive someone—a stranger—with a presence that was not just polite, but to receive them with revolutionary generosity?

- Rev. Marilyn Sewell

The efforts my parents made to be neighbourly and to reserve judgment against those who society viewed as outcasts served as important examples for their children and grandchildren as we grew into adulthood. Hospitality was the foundation of my family’s spirituality.

- Rosemarie Harding

That you need a village, if only for the pleasure of leaving it. Your own village means that you’re not alone, that you know there’s something of you in the people and the plants and the soil, that even when you are not there it waits to welcome you.

- Cesare Pavese

The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.

- Emily Dickinson

... having faith in our neighbours. It takes us into a context of hospitality, wherein we welcome strangers rather than believing we need to protect ourselves from them. It changes our mind-set from valuing what is efficient to valuing belonging. It helps us leave behind our penchant for seeing our disconnectedness as an inevitable consequence of modern life and moves us towards accountability and citizenship.

- Peter Block

It was well known by the local jail population that when you got released, you could go up to Mrs. Dyer's (my mother's) for a hot meal. I remember being invited to make our guest welcome by sitting at the card table in the hall to share a conversation as he ate his meal. From my mother, we learned about the dignity every person was entitled to, regardless of circumstances.

- Mary Gordon, founder of Roots of Empathy

"Warmest Welcome"

Through the door, running
Hair flowing magically
Welcomes me, my dog
- Baalak Baburo

"Your Body Is Welcome Here"

Your body is welcome here, all of it.
Yes, even that part. And that part. And yes,
even that part.
The parts you love, and the parts you don't.
For in this place we come with all that we are
All that we have been,
And all that we are going to be.
Our bodies are constantly changing, cells die
and cells are reborn
We respond to infections and disease
Sometimes we can divorce them from our
bodies,
and other times they become a permanent
part of us.
Your body and all that is within it, both
wanted and not wanted has a place here.
Our bodies join in a web of co-creation,
created and creating.
Constantly changing, constantly changing us
Scarred and tattooed, tense and relaxed
Diseased and cured, unfamiliar and intimate
Formed in infinite diversity of creation
Your body is welcome here, all of it.
So take a moment and welcome it
Take a moment to feel in it.
Take a moment, to be in it.
- Rev. Sean Neil-Barron

"The Guest House"

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

- Rumi



Photo by Flash Dantz on Unsplash

Admittedly, it is very hard to “welcome in” all the unwanted guests of life...

Whether they’re the physical weeds in the garden, or the metaphorical weeds, of personal challenges, mistakes, losses, hurts and fears.

Vivid and obvious, spread over our personal landscapes, sometimes the weeds of our lives are more numerous than we can count.

Sometimes they linger for long seasons... but like all life, they change and transform in shape and meaning...

And they change us along the way.

- Rev Lynn Harrison, “On Dandelions”, p. 2. Flower Communion Reflections, 29 May 2022

“Welcoming the Stranger”

A child journeys far from home
Fearful and brave,
in need of safe harbour.
Guided by this chalice, may we seek to understand the causes of flight.
Like the comfort of a candle flickering in a window of darkness,
Let us welcome this child into our home with warmth, nourishment, and love.
Would we not want the same for our own child, lost and alone in a strange land?

- Tracy Bleakney

“Acceptance”

When your past comes to live
in the woods behind your house,
you must go to the window,
forgive yourself once again,
and welcome the creature
that suns himself on the sill.

- Nancy Compton Williams

“Song for the Mira” (excerpt)

Out on the Mira the people are kind
They’ll treat you to homebrew and help you unwind
And if you come broken, they’ll see that you mend

I wish I was with them again

- Allister MacGillivray



Cape Breton Ceilidh, photo courtesy of Globe and Mail

“Red Brocade” – from 19 Varieties of Gazelle

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.
Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine Nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.
No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That's the armour everyone puts on to
pretend they had a purpose
in the world.
I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

- Naomi Shihab Nye



“The Fine Art of the Good Guest” – from *A Guest of the World*

The most important thing that I've learned in traveling to more than twenty countries is the art of being a guest. And I'm a particularly fine visitor at the supper table. I've consumed live fish in Inner Mongolia, not-quite-coagulated blood sausage on the Tibetan plateau, shredded pig's ear in China, grilled lamb fat in Uzbekistan, horse steaks in Kazakhstan, vodka made from fermented mare's milk in Siberia, vegemite in Australia, goat in Brazil, and snails in France. I don't have an iron stomach, by any means, but I do have the will to be a virtuous visitor.

We are all visitors—even when we are home. Our time in any relationship or place is ultimately limited. We are passing through; nobody stays forever. How might we act if we consider ourselves guests in the lives of friends and family? Being a good guest is rather simple in principle but occasionally challenging in practice.

One begins by demanding nothing more than the bare elements of life and dignity, which every host is more than delighted to exceed. The good guest then simply allows the other person to be a good host—to share his gifts, to play her music, to tell his stories, to show her places, and to serve his foods. Finally, a guest should cultivate and express genuine gratitude. It need not be effusive or exorbitant, only sincere. We might also think of ourselves as uninvited, but not unwelcome, guests of the planet.

And I think the rules for being a good guest of the world are just the same: Ask little, accept what is offered, and give thanks.

- Jeffrey Lockwood

Optional Spiritual Exercise

Over the coming weeks, tally up the times and places you feel truly welcome. Pay attention to the quality of those moments. Explore the conditions that were set to make that feeling of hospitality or inclusion possible. Were they intentional or by happenstance? Was it the act of an individual or was it the work of an institution that was striving to make you feel welcome?

If you're feeling particularly bold this month, turn the lens in the opposite direction. How often have you caused someone else to feel welcome? What was required of you to do that? Was it effective?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*.

Upcoming Themes

May – Freedom

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

April 2nd | “The Honour System”
Rev. Shawn Newton

April 16th | “Braiding Sweetgrass”
Earth Day Sunday
Rev. Shawn Newton

April 9th | “Coming Back to Life”
Celebration of Passover and Easter
Rev. Shawn Newton

April 23th | “When you can't go home”
Chaplain Nicole McKay

April 30th | “Ah, Wilderness”
Rev. Stephen Atkinson

The Journey Team

Sue Berlove, *Registrar* | Margaret Kohr, *Coordinator* | Yvonne Raaflaub, *Curator* | Josée Thibault, *Layout Editor*
[Rev. Shawn Newton](#)