

Send Them Away

READING
Romans 15
Luke 7
Hebrews 13
Genesis 18

*We wouldn't want his stinky
smell in here would we!*

The area I lived in when I first became a Christian was pretty small. Around our “town” there was one homeless guy. People knew him, they knew his family, he’d gotten into drugs a bit, but was a reasonably nice guy. Not the criminal type. We would see him walking around town every now and then.

I used to get to church early. One day it was really raining hard. Absolutely pouring down. Someone came up to me and said, “that homeless guy came to church”. I said, “Oh! Where is he?” They replied, “Don’t worry, the guy at the door sent him away”.

WHAT!!

In the pouring rain!
All he wanted was to get out of the rain for an hour, and maybe have a hot drink and a biscuit.
But the church sent him away.

I went to confront the guy on the door. When I asked why he had sent him away, he replied, “Well we wouldn’t want his stinky smell in here would we!”

Oh I was so furious. I jumped in my car and drove everywhere I could think of trying to find him and bring him back. After half an hour, and no success, I finally stopped. I cried out to God, and I just bawled my eyes out. Sobbing out loud. How could a church do that to someone!

When I was at Bible College we used to go to the local pub one night a week and hang out with people there. “Frenchie” was one of the regulars. He was king of the pub. Everyone loved him. Everyone respected him. He was OK with us only drinking cola. So two of us from college used to play darts against Frenchie and his mate, “Goat”. They would drink their beers, we would drink our colas.

Over time we got to know them, and they got to know us. (We were up front from the start that we were from the Bible college). One day I asked Frenchie why he didn’t go to church. It turned out that his little sister used to go to church all the time. But then she got pregnant, and was unmarried. So the church kicked her out and told her never to come back!

Just when she needed them the most. The church sent her away.

When I first moved to Silicon Valley, (as a software developer in the 90’s), we tried out several churches to see which one fit us the best. We weren’t too fussed about denomination. (Btw, I was also stunned that there were 20 pages of churches and about 40 denominations in the phone book!)

But anyway, I went along to one church which sounded OK, and was close to home. I went by myself and I dressed in shorts and t-shirt. (It’s California!) Everyone was in a suit. (Well, the men anyway). Everyone. Nobody would talk with me. Nobody welcomed me. I went home with a very clear message, “Don’t come back”. But I did. I came back the next week, in a suit, with my wife and two young children. It was like a different world. They were welcoming. Everyone wanted to talk. They were inviting us to all sorts of things. And not one person realised I was the guy from the week before.

We didn’t go there.

We had both worked in an Australian church school using a US Christian curriculum, and we had home schooled our kids using that during Bible college. So we found a couple of schools in San Jose which used the same one. I rang around because we only wanted to bring our kids one day a week, and home school them the other 4. One pastor had a small school, and he was so excited to have us come. And when he realised that we had just moved to the area he also offered to help with any moving, or if we needed help finding things. He was amazing.

We **did** go there.

It was on the other side of town. (Which is American for “poor people”). They were amazing. White, Hispanic, Black, ... all together. All loving and supporting each other. We made some amazing friends there. It was fantastic. So hospitable. We had so many meals at people’s homes. We even got invited to Thanksgiving. It was how church should be.

How about you?
How did Yeshua welcome you when you first came to him?
As Paulus said in Romans 15, “Therefore accept one another, just as the Anointed also accepted you, in order for the glory of God”.
Are you welcoming others the way Yeshua would?
If your church had welcomed you the way your church welcomes those smelly, sinful, desperate people who come to you, where would you be today? Still lost?

Would Yeshua send them away?
That’s a very Pharisee thing to do isn’t it!
Remember the sinful woman with the jar of perfume who poured it on Yeshua’s feet and wiped it off with her hair. She washed his feet with her tears.
The people around him wanted to send her away. “Doesn’t he know what kind of woman she is!”
Of course he knew, but he knew she had been sent by Yahweh. He knew her life was being changed.
She didn’t need judgement, she already had plenty of that. She needed love and acceptance.

Hebrews 13 starts with this:
“Don’t forget hospitality, for because of this some were oblivious to having given lodging to messengers (angels). Be mindful of prisoners, as if you’ve been bound together with them, of the mistreated, as if you yourselves were also in the body.”
Imagine finding out that the day they visited you, you turned them away. You refused to welcome angels from God!

How much better to be like Abraham in Genesis 18.
He raced out to welcome them. He wouldn’t let them go past without at least having water and something little to eat.
When they accepted, he got his wife to bake cakes, he got a servant to prepare a calf for them to eat.
He went over the top.

If he had sent them away - the way so many modern churches would have - there would be no Isaac.
His nephew, Lot, would have been destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.
The Bible would have been a lot shorter.
And you and I would be lost forever.

Be like Abraham.
Be like Yeshua.

Welcome others the way you would want to be welcomed.
Welcome others the way Yeshua would welcome them.

Make them amazed at how welcoming you are.
Bring glory to Yahweh.