

DAY 36

STRANGER



Matthew 25:35

"I was a stranger and you invited me in."

Stranger (def.) "A person whom one does not know or with whom one is not familiar. A stranger is a person who does not know, or is not known in a particular place or community."

Have you ever felt like a stranger? Not known? Not seen? Maybe it was when you started a new school or were new in your neighborhood. Have you felt like you might not matter? Like you're not very important? I sure have - (even at church this past Sunday- it was great to see people, but I had this underlying, unsure feeling of disconnection- of not being "known" like I used to be.) It's going to take some time to reconnect and feel familiar again. It's never fun to feel like a stranger.

That feeling has been more common than we might think this past year. We can feel like strangers when we're in situations where we have few genuine connections with other people. That sense of disconnect can happen at work, in our church communities, and even in our homes- at least some of the time.

It encourages me to know and to see in scripture that Jesus and some NT writers made it a point to call out how important it is to 'welcome the stranger.' A favorite verse of mine is in Hebrews 13:2, which says that "when we show hospitality to strangers, we may be entertaining angels unaware." And we're not just encouraged to make strangers around us feel at home, but we also are reminded and even promised that Christ comes close to us when we do.

Verses 35-40 say, in the context of the final judgement, "For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

Welcoming strangers is one of the most foundational elements of our discipleship as believers. Seeing and acknowledging this can help make us more aware of both the strangers around us and also motivate us to reach out and welcome them.

There's no getting around that Jesus identifies himself with those in need. If you help them, he says, you are really helping me; and if you ignore them, you are ignoring me. (Selah)

- Do you identify yourself with those in need?
- Do you ever think of that in terms of "helping Jesus?" When you did it to one of the least of these. You are doing it to me? Take a few moments and talk to Jesus about this...ask him to change your perspective
- What makes YOU feel welcome when you've been or felt like a stranger?

Prayer: Jesus, would you give us eyes to see that the true test of our authenticity as a Christian is not what we say we believe, or our faith, or our Bible knowledge, but the genuine concern we show to those who are in need, usually when no one else is around. Help us to take to heart that the most practical demonstration of love is the final proof. Engrave on our hearts the realization that Jesus identifies himself with those in need. If we help them, we're really helping and ministering to Jesus; and if we ignore them, we're ignoring Jesus. We can't do this without you. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Daily Practice

As you go about your day today, be on the lookout for a stranger along your path-- maybe a new colleague where you work, a visitor at church, a new person/family who has moved into your neighborhood, or someone who is lonely, even on the street. Take the initiative to say "hi," introduce yourself--reach out with an elbow bump, and take a genuine interest in them. You'll be doing it to/for Jesus.

The below reflections are written by congregants & staff of CPC. All reflections are following Trevor Hudson's book Pauses for Lent and are both heavily influenced and borrowed from his work. Any quotes without attribution should be credited to him.