

TAKEAWAY: THE WELCOMING CHURCH

Sunday 16th January 2022

On Sunday, Matt spoke from James 2 about what it is to be a welcoming church. We focused particularly on Sunday gatherings – especially with refocusing to be a church of mid-size congregations, serving our local community together.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be a welcoming church?
2. Who do you know that is good at welcoming people? What makes them good at it?

James 2:1-4 'My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 'Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the later, even though his personal intentions may be ever so earnest and honest and sacrificial.'

Note: In James's society there was a huge gap between rich and poor with almost no middle; you were either very rich or you were very poor, generally speaking. People that were rich were treated like they were better, and many people actually believed that if you were rich it must be because you were a better person. In the synagogues, most people sat on benches, but the 'best' seats were on raised platforms, if you were sat on those, you were literally above everybody else, so there was a very visual reminder of your 'greater importance'.

Questions

3. What is favouritism and why do we do it? How much do you think we do it unconsciously?
4. How might our 'dream 'of community' cause us to show favouritism at Maybridge Community Church?

James 2:12-13 'Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.'

Questions

5. James calls us to speak and act differently - but what, in your own words, are the reasons he gives for doing so? Why do the reasons matter - shouldn't we just try to be nice people?

6. How can we practically be more welcoming when we gather?
How radical do we need to be?
7. How could you personally be more welcoming?

Note: Here is one practical suggestion: why not try to sit with different people regularly, or ask a new person to join you wherever you are?

Reflection & Prayer

Ask God to show you ideas for how you can be more welcoming, and help you action those ideas. You might like to reflect on another Dietrich Bonhoeffer quote:

'The more clearly we learn to recognise that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.'