

When you go to somebody's house, do you worry about feeling welcome? For the most part, I don't believe that any of us worry about that. When we go to somebody's house, we usually friends with them and so if we did not get along with them, chances are that we would not even go there.

But what about total strangers. When we go to meet them, do we worry about feeling welcome or making them feel welcome? As a pastor, there have been numerous instances where I meet new people and I always try to make them feel welcome. But is that just expected of me because I am a pastor.

I met a couple of guys from the car site I belonged to. I went to a gathering in Ohio a few years back and met Cam, Willy, Evil and Sherman, Camaro 69, and Twiz. I met T in Oklahoma last fall. VW girl and Dan stopped by for a visit quite a few years ago. And then there is Colorado who now lives in Abilene and I buried his mom a couple of months ago.

As I met each one of them, I felt welcomed by them and when they stopped by the parsonage, they were welcomed there as well. I think we try to go out of our way to make people feel at home and you don't have to be a pastor to do that. I contacted a guy in Colorado who makes slot car bodies and he invited Heidi and I to stop by and race. If need be, they have a spare bedroom and good food at no charge. He doesn't know me outside of Pastor Bubba but the first thing he asked was if I was a real pastor.

When we go places, we want to feel welcome and when people come to our homes, we want them to feel welcome. But that isn't just our homes because take Immanuel for instance. When people come here, we also want them to feel welcome. Even if we have no idea who they are, we want them to feel welcome.

That feeling of being welcomed is very important for us. It was also very important in our gospel reading as well. Jesus was sending the disciples out to the villages that they could minister to the people. And he warned them about the reception that they might receive because he said they were being sent out as lambs into the midst of wolves. Wolves love to eat lambs and so I am sure that the disciples were not all that excited to head out. But the last thing that Jesus told the disciples before they left was, "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me."

As they went, they took nothing for themselves but relied solely on the towns that they entered for their survival. They were relying on the communities to welcome them into their midst. And if the town welcomed them, then the disciples stayed and ate and healed their sick. But if they were not welcomed into a community, they turned around and went on down the road to the next town.

And when they were finished, they were excited because they saw God at work through them. They knew that God had blessed everything they did so that the people may experience God in their life. They did not talk about the communities that did not welcome them but instead focused on the ones that did. Not every town welcomed them but the ones they talked about were the ones that did.

That is essentially the same for us. One comment that I have heard about why people are not comfortable in talking about their belief in God is that they don't want to be rejected by whoever they are talking to. They don't want that feeling of being unwelcomed.

So instead of being rejected, they would rather not say anything. But Jesus says to us, "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me." Jesus tells us to share our faith anyway and not to worry about whether somebody rejects us. The emphasis is on the telling of what God has done for you. Some people will listen to what we have to say and others will not.

We do not have control over who listens and who doesn't, but if we are not willing to share, then nobody will hear. The feelings of being welcomed against those feelings of being rejected are very real. But welcome people into your midst as you share your faith. Don't worry about what others will say or think but instead trust in what God is doing through you.