

Epiphany Devotion

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⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

As followers of Christ we are called to reach out to others and to love, not just our neighbor, but our enemies too. That not only seems impossible to do but also a radical idea. We seem to be in a world that pits “us” against “them.” But Jesus is saying there is no “in” group or “out” group, Jew or gentile, right or left. That must have been hard for people to comprehend two thousand years ago just as it is hard for us to do so today. Do we welcome all people or just our like-minded friends?

I have experienced unconditional welcome on the small island nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG). If you haven’t yet watched the attached video, you may want to do so now. The Lutheran church in PNG is a partner of the Central States Synod of the ELCA of Kansas and Missouri.



Starting with a closed wall made of bamboo and banana leaves, the wall is taken down and my friends and I are welcomed into their village. They had never met us before. All they knew was we were from a country half a world away and we were there to walk beside them as fellow children of God. Singing, dancing, spreading flowers ... a radical welcome indeed.

We may not all be on the same note, but we can blend in beautiful harmony. Together we make a more powerful statement as followers of Christ. If you need a song to raise your spirits today, listen to the words and the beautiful harmony of the song "One Voice" by the USAF band, my favorite version.



I cannot help but believe that we all would be much better off accepting and welcoming each other rather than looking for and pointing out our differences. We are one body. Let's celebrate!

