

Dear Friends,

Welcome! Bienvenue, Croeso, Willkommen, Welkom. These are just a few languages (French, Welsh, German and Dutch) of saying welcome. We all like to feel a sense of welcome either in a country when we visit or to specific locations. I saw a 'welcome' sign above a door and wondered where the origins of the word came from. So, with the internet to the rescue, I found that the word welcome is an Old English word *wilcuma* which means 'a person whose coming is pleasing.'

Isn't that lovely? We all know how uncomfortable it is if we don't feel welcome and so, to feel welcome is to be valued and to know our company is sought after. It is a place to feel comfortable, settled and at peace. To be welcomed is to go way beyond being tolerated to something deeper.

We worship God who welcomes everyone. God the Creator made our beautiful world as a place of welcome for humanity. Jesus came to the world as a human being, living alongside others, so we might know what it means for God to be in the world, and how to respond to others who don't recognise God for themselves. Jesus died and rose again demonstrating his love for all people and to enable all who respond to this love to be welcomed into the life of God. The Holy Spirit prompts and guides us, encouraging us to respond to God's great and welcoming love, so that others may come to know God for themselves.

God welcomes all people as those 'whose coming is pleasing.' God showed us this through Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. Thinking about this leads me to ask how do we welcome God into our lives? God in Christ longs to be part of our lives, not just on a Sunday, but in every part of every day. God longs to be 'a person 'whose coming is pleasing' to us.

God welcomes us as we are and then, through Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, as we respond to that welcome we are transformed more and more into the likeness of him. As we do this, we can more easily reflect the love of God to others. The invitation here then is to think how we can welcome others, and encourage them towards Jesus, as those 'whose coming is pleasing to us,' so they can experience the love and grace of God for themselves. There is much here on which we can ponder and reflect.

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to everyone for the welcome I've received since returning from sabbatical. I have genuinely felt very welcomed. It's been really lovely to see everyone and it's great to be back! There is much for us to do as we continue to work together, and I look forward to all that is to come.

God bless,
Chris