

WE LIKE PEOPLE LIKE YOU

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Church
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Edgar King
Kingdom of God, Welcome, Radical Invitation
Matthew 6:33

Any Sunday morning you walk into any of our celebrations there are things that you will experience some of which you will notice immediately some as you watch and interact keenly.

You will find people from different cultures. We have a few Nationalities here, several tribes or people groups from Kenya represented here. You will walk in and notice that there are different races. And I have to say that that is a gift from God. Only God could have put us together. Whatever ethnic culture you are from, we like people like you. This is not a Mungu church or an Africans only church. This is not a Luo or Kikuyu church. We are a church of the Kingdom of God. And in that Kingdom all are welcome.

Another diversity in culture you will see around here is in age. The young and old sit and serve together. Men and women sit and serve together here. Last week I mentioned that some of the best things you have seen around here have been made possible by women's leadership or even financing.

You will also notice that there will be people driving in, some will be walking in. Some will have had a square meal while others will be hoping there are feedbags at the back. We are a church for the rich and the poor to be and serve in one place as brothers.

There will be other things that will take you a bit of time and diving into relationship to notice. But if you hang around long enough you will find that in here there are Catholics, people from the Presbyterian church, people from Anglican Church. One of my friends told me, "The Holy Spirit tells me I should be here, but I keep wondering if I am cheating on my Anglican Church"

You will find people from different evangelical traditions. Actually so many times I stand here and speak and I can tell that I just said something that some people in the crowd do not agree with. Because you can see their heads shake or too still as they try to hide their disagreement with me. Because we are multi-theological.

This is not to mean that we do not or I do not have a stand on things theological, rather it is to say it is our differences that make us beautiful and we realize that we are more alike than we are different. It is to say that we recognize that no one's theology is perfect not even mine, certainly not yours. It is to say that we wanna yield to the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. And sometimes that comes from interactions with people whose theology is a bit different from our own.

The other is harder to notice because these conversations are getting more intense by the day but you will find here people from the whole spectrum of the political divide. Right here there are those who in their political views are conservative and there are liberals and all are welcome here. There are those who wish to see Raila as President of Kenya and those who wish to see Ruto Kick his butt in the elections and those who cannot make up their mind and so might just go for a Uhuru third term. And we like people like you too.

Politics can stir passions and excitement. But we know none is perfect. So we are grateful and intentional about the space where we can respectfully have political discourse and still disagree agreeably. What we will never agree with is the notion that to be a believer is to support a particular candidate or party and therefore dismissing the other. If anything, as believers we have very little choice when it comes to political parties as none really represent Jesus across the globe. Even those that claim to just to capture votes from church people.

The other thing you will notice will be in the language we use. And the parties or events we throw. You will notice that we try to use language that is accessible to unchurched people. Even events we do are often accessible to unchurched people.

Because we want to be a church for the unchurched. What that means is if you have been going to church for 50 years, you can find a home here. And for those who have never been to church or have not been for a long time, you will not feel like an outsider.

I remember being at a pub in England with some of my worship leader friends and at some point in the night a bell rang. That was so unusual. I had no idea what that meant and what I was supposed to do in that case. Turns out it is a last-call signal and so everyone was to get in their final orders.

I do not want the church to make anyone feel like I did in that particular pub. So we explain communion every week and we use very simple words and when we have to use words that are only used around church we explain them. We tell people who Paul is and that Peter is one of the disciples of Jesus. We use language that people use every day instead

of specialized church language and where we have to, we make sure we explain it. We do not assume that everyone knows and we do not insist that everyone should know and if we like people like you, we will make sure that our language is accessible to you. And sometimes people tell me,

“But we know”

“You explained it last week and the week before”

“Everyone knows who Paul is”

But really, not everyone does and even if they are just one person, they matter to us, they matter to Jesus. He is the kind of God who leaves the 99 to find the one. Some people who are against this are against it because like us they believe that Jesus is Good News that the world needs. I think if we have good news it needs to reach the whole world, so why would we communicate in a language only church people would understand?

We go a step further and even take away anything that is not central to long Jesus that may be a barrier to faith. Come the way you are. Dress up or not. Except if you are on my team and then I expect that you dress simply because we want everyone to find us accessible.

All this diversity is quite honestly a gift from God. We do not pretend or claim to have made it happen. At the same time, we are intentional to maintain and keep this diversity. We really believe that all are welcome in God’s Kingdom. And if we will be a church of the Kingdom of God we will have to be as welcoming to everyone as God is in his Kingdom. And the culture of a church is not accidental. Welcome is not accidental it has to be thought through, decided upon and lived out. Just like who is welcome in your house is not accidental.

No one in the church denies that all are welcome. Ask anyone who believes in Jesus if the church should be a welcoming place for everyone and most of them would say yes. But then walk into churches and you will be able to see whether they live out that welcome. You see, what matters is not what you write on your notice boards what matters is what people live out. Are all really welcome?

If we really believe everyone is welcome, we should make room for them. Do we stand in groups and stand off from people who are not like us? Do we find new people at church and say hi to them or do we think they are invading our space? Are we making room for new people?

When we say all are welcome are ready to make sure that those people will indeed feel welcome to do we demand they behave a certain way before they are included in the community?

And these are not just fancy ideas that we want to live by. We really believe that this is how the Kingdom of God really looks like.

Right from the beginning, the creator creates diversity in landforms and creators. Some very beautiful. Some of the things God creates you can just tell He was having fun and enjoying diversity. Like the donkey and her cousin the zebra. The little Chihuahua dog with a big attitude and the big Labradors with bigger hearts.

Then man and woman he created them. Then God causes to spring up different races. And as people lived in different realities they developed different languages and different cultures. All of them having God's beauty in them while still broken by humanities brokenness and sin.

Jesus the spitting image of the invisible God comes around and he has so many disciples, men and women who follow him everywhere learning from him. From this group, he picks 12 men to be apostles. And actually, one ancient writing actually refers to Mary Magdalene as an apostle.

Among the 12 apostles was great diversity. There was a tax collector who in the eye of the Jews was a sinner and a collaborator with the enemy colonial regime. There was a member of a violent sect that looked forward to the liberation of Israel even if by bloodshed. There were also pious Jews. Unlearned fishermen and men with better trade like Judas who was good with accounts. His ministry was supported by women. This is the kind of diversity Jesus worked with. Some of the diversity even seemed to be in opposition to each other.

Then in the final picture of the Kingdom of God that John a follower of Jesus saw in a vision, we see before the throne of God our father all of creation. Every tongue, every tree and every nation filled with the Holy Spirit.

Diversity from the beginning, Diversity when Jesus came and Diversity when Jesus returns and into forever. And here on the Earth may His Kingdom come and to be a church of the Kingdom we will look towards being a church that is diverse in all way.

Now, where the Kingdom of God is, there will be diversity. It is just who God is. We are then responsible for working on the human parts of it. So the question of who is welcome and

who is not is not a question fo whether God welcomes them but whether you welcome them among you. But why would you shut the door on someone yet God has welcomed you when there are so many reasons why you would be left out too?

We genuinely like people like you. Whatever background you do come from. We want to make sure that we don't just say you are welcome here but to live out that welcome to you. We might not be getting right yet but we are committed to living out the welcome of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

So what does this mean? To have different cultures, different tribes, different theological backgrounds? It means that we will be living right in the middle of the tensions. Because we are different and continuously pulling together.

Human beings have this need for community as we were wired like that so we form tribes. And when I say tribes I mean a group of people similar in culture and collective world view. Unfortunately, in our fallen nature, we start seeing other tribes as existing in opposition to us. There is always a false Us v them dichotomy.

There develops this idea that they are wrong and we are right. We cannot for the life of us imagine why anyone would do life the way they do. How someone could choose what they chose. How someone supports that party does not just make sense to us. We all have a way of having a 'they', 'those people'. How can anyone not be like us?

One day Joshua who was a great leader of Israel was leading the Israelites into battle. And if you know the story you know that Israel had been chosen by God for the purposes of God. So he notices an angel from God fully dressed for battle.

What would your natural assumption be? Well, if this is God's chosen nation if an angel of war is sent in battle, it's a no brainer whose team he is on. But then he asks the angel which side he is on and the angel says

"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."

Even when we are convinced, rightfully or wrongly, that we are right, God is not against the people we want him to be against. To be for us God does not have to be against 'them'. Often times the only option we see is us or them every time the only option God sees is; Kingdom justice, Kingdom Healing, Kingdom reconciliation, Kingdom peace, the Kingdom of God.

God is for you and is just as much for those people you consider them. God is for Asians as much as he is for Africans and Caucasians. God is for Raila's people as much as He is for Ruto's people. God is for Democrats as much as he is for Republicans. God is for God's Kingdom and everyone has been invited into this Kingdom.

One day Jesus is teaching his disciples both men and women and they were many. And he is teaching them about the life of the Kingdom of God and even goes against teachings that had existed in the Jewish religious community for decades. Because just because something has been taught for years does not make it right. If God's Kingdom confronts it we have to let it go.

You have been taught to love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. He, after all, loves each of us—good and evil, kind and cruel. He causes the sun to rise and shine on evil and good alike. He causes the rain to water the fields of the righteous and the fields of the sinner. It is easy to love those who love you—even a tax collector can love those who love him. And it is easy to greet your friends—even outsiders do that! But you are called to something higher: “Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

People who look like us. People who see the world the way we do are not hard to love. People who pray like us are easy to love. And if pushed too hard it is easy to love people who call themselves Christians. We might not agree on everything but we share that Jesus is Lord. And we are called to love these people.

But in the Kingdom of God, it goes beyond that. In the Kingdom of God, we are called to go further, to love those who find hard to. That calls us to reach across the divide. We want to be the church where you will come and meet people like you, and some who are not.

And the only place to start is a church that says, “ We Like People Like You” and have a Big Bold Genuine and Radically welcome to everyone. To join Jesus in the place where we not only love those who love us but those who are in opposition and enmity to us too.

But Love Does. Love is not just written on a Wall. Love moves to action. Love is Kind. So let us talk about kindness for a bit. It is easier to be kind to people like you. They do not challenge you much but I invite you to be kind to people who are difficult for you. Love difficult people because of, news flash, you are one of them. If you think you are putting up with people, here is some news, they are putting up with you too. So how can we be Kind?

Believe the best of people. Often times in relationships there is information gap. They are running late and you do not know why. There is an information gap. He is on the street and you do not know why. He is addicted to something and you do not know why. He uses very mean words and you do not know why. He believes that and you the other and you do not know why.

Often times people fill this information gap with negative judgements of the other. Oh well, he is cheating on me. Oh well, he must be a terrible person. Oh well, they hate me. When presented with an information gap, choose to believe the best about a person. And approach it from that perspective.

Choose truth over lies and rumours. If you have the opportunity to say something about someone, choose truth. Choose to focus on whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy.

And Kindness is not niceness. So give genuine feedback. If something is not going write do not butter it up. In that case, you are being nice but you are being unkind as something left unattended will hurt not only that person but everyone connected to them.

So how do we live out kindness in this community? We have a need to focus on relationships. We want everything to happen organically in relationship. So we give hugs. We are keen to say sorry when we are wrong because we do make mistakes. We celebrate people.

This is where it gets hard, we lay down our rights for the sake of the other. We will seek relationships even at the expense of being misunderstood. Even when people give us reason after reason not to like them we will stick around and genuinely desire to know their story

But here is the thing, this community cannot be what we are not seeking to be individually. So I invite you to be radically inclusive. Who is eating at your table? Who is around you? What do you say about those white people? What do you say about those Kenyan people? Who do you greet right after church and in the office and how do you not greet and why?

So take for a moment and think about that one person or group of people that you find so hard to agree with. You just do not like what they stand for. I want you to love them and invite them to church here. Maybe it's their sexual choices, maybe it's their lifestyle, maybe it's their political preferences. People who are struggling with addictions and people who

are running from their addictions. Can you radically invite them in? Can you genuinely be interested in knowing their story?

You see, it is easier not to care about people if you do not know their story. It is easier to dislike someone struggling with an addiction if you do not know their story. It is easier to look at someone's life choices and think yourself better for living differently just because you do not know their story. It is easier to think someone is crazy in their choice of religion or theology until you know their story. You would probably have not acted any different in their shoes.

It is sometimes easier to judge when God is inviting us to trust the Holy Spirit. At this point, I have probably ticked some of us off. And that is okay. We, myself included, have a 'them' and it is those that God is calling us to love and radically invite and create space for them at our table.

Let's Pray