

This summer we're talking about our five core values here at Reservoir Church. A couple weeks ago we started out by looking at "connection"; today we're going to think about how we want to make our church welcoming to "everyone".

At Reservoir we believe that connection with Jesus makes people's lives better, and we believe that our church helps people to connect with Jesus. So naturally we want to invite as many people as we can to come share what we're doing! But that doesn't mean that inviting everyone—really everyone—is always easy. We're used to having things a certain way. We know the people who are already part of our community. What if, when different kinds of people join our church, they end up changing things?

Even Jesus sometimes had trouble inviting everyone to share his message. Once he was in Phoenicia—a country near Judah where the people weren't Jewish—and a woman came to him asking him to heal her daughter. At first Jesus refused: he saw his mission as witnessing to the Jewish people, and she was a Phoenician. He told her, "I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel." When she persisted, he said, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." That sounds kind of harsh!

It didn't stop the woman, though! She answered, "That's true—but even the dogs can eat the scraps that fall under their masters' table."

"Well!" answered Jesus, "you have impressive faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed.

When I read that it sounds to me like Jesus was thinking about his ministry in one way and the woman challenged him to look at it differently. The same thing happened when Peter visited Cornelius, ate dinner with him and his family, and ended up baptizing all of them into the community of believers. When the other apostles heard what had happened they were shocked that Peter had even gone into a Gentile's house, never mind baptizing one! They were thinking about their new community in one particular way—as Jewish people exploring a new relationship with God through Jesus—and it was hard for them to wrap their heads around the idea that Gentiles could be part of that relationship too. What would happen to their Jewish traditions in that case?! Last month we heard a little bit about the struggles they had working through that question as more and more Gentiles became believers.

I wonder if you've ever had a time when someone asked to be included, but you weren't sure if it would work having them join you. Maybe they don't know how to play what you're playing. Maybe they're annoying! But if you're thinking about connection after our story from two weeks ago, you might decide that it's worth it to risk a little change—or annoyance—to make a connection with someone new.

At church, we care about connecting with people, and we care about connecting people with Jesus. So that means we need to welcome everyone, even people who might make us uncomfortable for one reason or another. Maybe they speak a different language, or are used to praying differently, or even believe different things than we do. But they're part of the body of Christ, and we have important things to share with them. And more than that, we can learn from them too, so we can better understand the world, and God.

flip over for more!

Wondering Questions

I wonder if you ever felt excluded from a group that you wanted to be part of?

I wonder if you ever included someone in an activity that you maybe wished you could have *not* included?