

Thursday, April 16

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Pastor Hank French

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... (Matthew 25:35b).

Wouldn't it be great if every church was like the tavern in the old TV sitcom *Cheers!*—"a place where everybody knows your name"? Of course, even a church the size of First Lutheran with our two worship services is too big for everyone to know everyone's name, but I bet most of us could know a lot more names than we do.

Most large churches in this fast-paced, over-scheduled, frantic world we live in are not true communities, they are aggregates of individuals, who gather for worship once a week, or perhaps once a month, with people whose names they mostly don't know. When worship is over for the day they scatter and largely lead lives that don't touch each other. That's somewhat inevitable given the kind of world we live in, but there are some things we can all do to increase the feeling of community at First Lutheran. We can always be more intentional about greeting each other, introducing ourselves to those we don't know, inviting strangers to stay for coffee after worship, listening to their stories and telling our stories, and doing "random acts of kindness" for both those we know and those we don't.

We all know how it feels to be included and we all know how it feels to be excluded. We know what it's like to be greeted and we know what it's like to be ignored. We've experienced what it feels like when people know and use our name, and we know what it's like to feel invisible, nameless.

For people of faith, acts of welcoming, of including, of being hospitable and kind draw us into the mystery of Christ present in every person. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." "When Lord did we see you a stranger and welcome you?" "As you did it to another, you did it to me." Such mysteries are not meant to be explained, they are meant to be lived in.

Prayer: Welcoming God, draw me into the mystery of Christ's presence in the people I meet and greet and get to know today. Amen.