

Strangers Arriving!



The peacocks above are strangers to us. They arrived recently, and have been visiting us and our neighbours since then. I tried to find their owners but failed. I thought they would go away, but although every few days they disappear, they return. They disrupt us, our hens and the native birds around us. What are we to do, and what has this to do with relating to God, and living as Christians loving one another?

Surprises, like strangers appearing, can be enjoyed at times, but most of us who are older, prefer our daily lives to be more or less settled. We can then sink into the contentment of a fixed routine we know, and that suits us! However, unexpected events will, and frequently do, enter our lives, challenge us, and can help us to grow in God's love.

As Christians, we are called to a ministry which involves living out God's love and compassion in our relationships with others. They, like us, are God's creation and we are to learn from them, share with them, and love them.

But, how do we feel and behave when strangers turn up at our Sunday morning Church Service? Does it depend on how they look or act? Or does it vary with how we are feeling at that moment? Alternatively, do we, ourselves, sometimes feel awkward strangers who do not belong in certain situations, and

wish we were somewhere else?

Our three hens did not welcome the peacocks, which were large birds unknown to them. They were afraid of them and kept their distance. The peacocks, on the other hand, were not aggressive and showed more interest in the hens' water and food than in the hens themselves.

If we fear or try to ignore strangers that enter our lives, can we transform those feelings? Could we do it by coming alongside of them, listening to them and asking them questions? This is a way Jesus often related to others.

When Jesus was 12 years old, he was taken by his parents to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. Afterwards he stayed behind when his parents left. Jesus was absorbed listening to the teachers in the temple and asking them questions. He respected and learnt from them. (Luke 2:41-46).

As an adult, Matthew tells us that Jesus joined with others and was baptised with them in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. At first John protested, but Jesus explained that this action was in obedience to God. (Matthew 3:14-17).

A friend of mine died recently. We had been friends since we were about 5 years old. During all that time, I do not remember us ever arguing. We did not always agree with each other, but that was accepted. We did things together, listened to and learnt from each other. Today I feel she is nearer to me than ever before, and a part of my life in God's love. I give thanks to God for her life and friendship.

My friend was a Presbyterian, but that did not matter to us. We can all benefit others and ourselves by sharing with Christians from different denominations, but what about all the non-Christians in the world, especially those unlikely to have had any opportunity to know Jesus? I have often wondered, as you may have also, about such people, many who are very loving and caring. What happens when they die?

At baptism we Christians become members together of the body of Christ, the church, but God/Christ is present and active in all creation, binding us all together as kin. From this perspective, both Christians and non-Christians are our sisters and brothers, members of God's body. Even the non-human part of God's creation, animals and nature are united to us in God's love. However,

each day we hear or read of the killing and injuring of people by other people in wars, women killed or abused in acts of domestic violence, and recently, hateful anti-Semitic incidents raising fear in Australia. We also know of the suffering of animals and nature caused by Climate Change. How does a God of love relate to such suffering, and where do we as Christians fit in? I suggest that in God's love we are drawn to suffer with others who are suffering, and when we hurt others we hurt ourselves.

Like the three members of our Trinitarian God, we cannot exist alone. We are all alive in God's love, one with God and all creation. God is mystery, but I believe that God can be understood as, - an active relationship of love, which surrounds and pervades all God's creation, human and non-human, and in which we, through Christ, are invited to participate by loving others. (Such a concept may be difficult to grasp. If so, I suggest you sit quietly with it for a while, letting it speak to you.)

God is not like a powerful male figure sitting on a throne in the sky. Instead, our God strengthens and guides us to follow Jesus by loving, suffering and rejoicing with one another, and giving our lives to serve and care for others, especially strangers, who, with us, are part of God's loved creation.

(Note: the chooks and I are gradually coming to accept, and *even* appreciate, the presence of the peacocks in our lives!)

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