

THE WITNESS OF THE WELCOME TABLE

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I grew up in a family that taught me that life is hard and everything is unpredictable except death and taxes. People are out to get you, you have to take care of you and yours and if you are soft hearted you are a fool or a tool. I did not fit into this family very well. This world view did not ring true with my internal compass. I was a kind hearted kid. I worried that some people were less fortunate than me. In my family this was ingratitude, naivete and evidence that I would be unable to make a life for myself, inspite of my advantages.

Fast forward 20 years. In my teens and twenties I try to change the world. I am trying to not be a waste of resources. I must make the world a kinder, more just place or I have been a waste in the world. I have a home, food, an education, a safe country while others have none of these opportunities. If I do not do something good, it will be as if I cause all the suffering in the world by using up more than my fair share of the good stuff.

Fast forward 20 years. I have a wonderful life. And yet, Anxiety and depression are ongoing struggles for me. I am a sensitive person who can become despondent over injustice and thoughtlessness and cruelty. Too much NPR can send me into a tailspin of despair where I forget how to be connected to people and forget that I can feel joyful, and useful and full of purpose. Minor rudeness in everyday interactions can make me afraid for the safety of the world. I tell a friend that I wish I believed in God. I wish I had faith. She invites me to Hope Church.

I am welcomed at hope. I don't have to believe anything in particular. I can participate in the service, the table is for me. I hear that, broken as I am, I am God's beloved child. I learn that the kingdom of god is not yet and already. God is continually breaking into the world and I can be a part of it. I hear good news, nothing can separate me from the love of God. I learn that God can do great things, that there is peace beyond understanding, that sharing joys and concerns is part of community. I learn that seeing God in the world takes practice. The sunrise is a reminder, the crocus is a reminder, every small act of caring and kindness is a reminder. I learn that there are many, many smart, kind people who believe this and live into the call to be God's hands and feet in the world.

I am welcome at Hope and I am invited to deepen my Hope experience. I am invited to study and pray with others. I am invited to help raise money for a clinic in Ugundja Kenya. I am invited to pack bags of toiletries for the women of the Kitty Dukakis Treatment Center, I am invited to join a group dedicated to the spiritual practice of extravagant welcome. I am invited to church suppers, strawberry shortcake, Ice cream socials, work days, moving days and set up and clean up of many events. I am invited to make things out of wood for the church. I am invited to make meals for folks and take hikes to raise money for Habitat for Humanity. I am invited to so many things, I cannot do them all. I am still welcome. I am invited to celebrate many joys. One Sunday we pray in a big circle holding hands, what Frank calls a kumbaya moment. I look around and realize I really care about everyone I see.

I belong to a church now. It changes me and my life. I am more hopeful and more welcoming in the world. I am less often afraid and more often joyful. I am inspired by the faith and commitment and kindness of people I meet at Hope. I now believe that I can help the world through my church, with the hope that is in me, with my time, my talent and my treasure. At hope I get opportunities to work for justice and to practice kindness. I do not feel so small and helpless because Abbi and Neeka have great ideas, Matt and Amara started that non-profit, Polly and Sherezade are inspiring young people and new babies are being brought into this world with great joy and love. I am welcome to be a part of it. I hear the invitation every Sunday.