

# God is With Us: Welcome to Lubbock

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**This** text today is about welcome/greeting and hospitality. Father Abraham, the patriarch, the father of many nations, founder of the Hebrew people and friend of God. Abraham who is known for his faithful obedience to God. Abraham in our text today, is at least 99 years old, having been told in the previous chapter by God that his name is no longer Abram, but Abraham as sign of a covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham's also learned in the previous chapter that he will have a son with his 90 year old wife Sarai, who is now renamed by God, Sarah. Wow. In the Genesis chapter 18 text, Abraham exhibits welcome and hospitality to three angelic beings, one of whom is the Lord God Almighty.

“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.” “Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.” (Genesis 18:1-5)

Christmas Eve pastor's work, so I headed out early the **next day**, Christmas Day, to get to San Antonio by noon. I pulled up to my parents home and as I rang the doorbell my Dad answered with a huge hug and a hearty, “ Merry Christmas Jerry, welcome, welcome, come in, come in.”

I love to receive a warm welcome. Don't you? There is nothing like being ushered into someone's home with graciousness and care.

Abraham, as we read in the Genesis 18 text, rests in the shade during the heat of the day. Camping and refreshing his family and flocks near a grove of trees. Oak Trees. Terebinths in some of your translations. They were large trees common in Palestine that grew to 35 ft. These great trees served as boundary markers in Joshua 19:33. Jacob even hid some household idols under a Terebinth tree. And Deborah was buried under a Terebinth tree in Gen. 35:4.

The great trees of Mamre. Mamre is only mentioned in the OT Book of Genesis, and it is both a personal name, and the name of a place. In Gen. 14:13, 24, Mamre is the name of a man who joins with Abraham to fight against a coalition of opposing kings.

These oaks, these Terebinth trees of Mamre, could have been a former place of pagan worship. But at the time we read about Abraham as he welcomes the three visitors, “Mamre” is a grove of mighty oak trees and a place to rest.

Abraham looks up and sees three men standing nearby. In a New Testament way of thinking we might think of the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but Abraham sees the men, most likely two angels and the

Lord Almighty. Abraham falls to the ground, bows at their feet. What does bowing imply? Honor, respect, subservience, perhaps FEAR? A non inflated ego?

The scripture in verse 2 says Abraham “ran to,” or “hurried to” in some translations. Abraham hurried to them, he did not saunter, he did not amble, he hurried. In the Near Eastern customs of this time, hurrying illustrates welcoming and hospitality. Just like you hurry to open the door for your guests so as to not make them wait.

In the time of Abraham, there were 7 actions denoting hospitality and welcome.

1. Abraham gave prompt attention to his guests.
2. He bowed low
3. He spoke politely and respectfully to them
4. He called himself, "your servant."
5. He indicated it would be a blessing and honor for him to serve his guests.
6. He prepared a good meal for them
7. And Abraham waited on them.

Don't you like it when someone in a store or restaurant hurries to greet you, to meet your needs, to assist you? To take care of your needs? That indicates care, concern, compassion.

Vs. 3 is a request for an opportunity to show hospitality and welcome. "Do not pass your servant by." Abraham is saying, "wait, come here, rest, and let me bring you cool water, a meal, rest here. You are not an inconvenience; you are a guest, an honored guest. Let me do the things that indicate hospitality." In the Old Testament days, washing the feet was customary and inviting like in verse 4.

What are the things that **we do** in our homes and lives to **welcome** people when they come over for a visit? Sit them in the most comfortable chair, invite them for dinner, and ask if they want a glass of water, iced tea, cup of coffee. Can you fix them a meal, a snack?

If they are overnight guests, you set out fresh towels, and you have clean sheets on the bed, and hopefully a new bar of soap in the shower for them. You meet their needs.

Where do we show our hospitality at Lake Ridge UMC? To me, seeing this church with new eyes, I see friendly greeters who hold the door for me; strangers greet me, lots of eye contact. Folks walk across the aisle to speak to me.

So I get a call from the Abilene and Lubbock Dist. Superintendents on a conference call, mentioning to me that I will most likely be moving to Lubbock in June. *Welcome to Lubbock*

As a first time visitor, Susan Smith, church administrator, welcomed me and gave me the hour and a half tour. She showed me every bathroom, corridor, closet, worship space, classroom, and locked door in this building and in the Family Ministry Center. I was tired from all the walking. She told me about the ethos of this congregation. Warm, loving, vital, praying, and mission and outreach minded, welcoming.

When I told some of my fellow pastors that the bishop had appointed me to Lake Ridge UMC, they said, "you'll like LakeRidge. You'll like Lubbock, you'll feel welcome."

When I was 15 years old at Mt. Wesley camp in Kerrville Texas, I heard a call to ordained ministry, went to college with the intent to going to seminary after college, but met a lady who I married and.... life happened. Seminary was not in the plans. In the course of 20 years in the food business with Luby's, I did everything I could to assuage the nudging of the Holy Spirit. I was a lay speaker at church, took Disciple Bible Study, and taught Disciple 1,2, 3, 4, took the Experiencing God series, Crown Ministries, went on a Walk to Emmaus, served on Emmaus teams, and finally knew that I needed to answer the call to ministry. So, in 1998 I did, I surrendered. the rest is part of the story of my life.

You see, God **welcomes** us at all stages of life to be in relationship with him. Doesn't matter if you are 65 or over and never made a commitment to Christ. Doesn't matter if you are 12, and feel God calling to you to ask him to be Lord of you life. God wants us in relationship with him. Today. God welcomes us with open arms.

I was in Mexico for three weeks several years ago, living with a family in the interior of the country, south of Mexico City in Cuernavaca. It was mission, but also cross cultural. The woman of the house **welcomed** me

with open arms to her humble home. She showed me to my room, a simple bed on a hard packed dirt floor, a bare 40 watt bulb hanging from the ceiling. She showed me the outdoor bathroom facilities, and said that she would build a fire on Saturday to heat water for me so I could shower.

“Mi casa is su casa, mi familia is tu familia tambien.” Her home was my home. Her family, my family. The entire family was gracious, hospitable, and **welcoming**. They were proud of their home. Proud they could read and write, proud that they had a TV that worked... sometimes, (I saw “Baywatch “in Spanish) and proud that they had running water. Although it came in the window from a hose in the yard. They welcomed me.

In Luke 9: 5, Jesus is sending out the 12 disciples and instructs them that if “people do not **welcome** you; shake the dust off of your feet when you leave their town, as testimony against them.” Strong words from our Lord.

Mark 9:37 says “Whoever **welcomes** one of these little children in my name **welcomes** me; and whoever **welcomes** me does not **welcome** me, but the one who sent me.”

When you **welcome** the courageous first or second, or third time visitor, you **welcome** Jesus Christ. It takes great courage to pull up to a new church, and get out. Where do I go? When does worship start? Will I know what to do? When do I stand? When do I sit? Where are the restrooms? They said they have coffee and rolls, but where are they?

If you come here for the first time, you would want someone to call your name, offer you a seat, invite you to sit with them, introduce you to their friends. And you'd enjoy that note or call from them later on in the week, right?

LakeRidge UMC has been most gracious and welcoming to me. They sent some helpers to unload my truck when I moved, Rev. Couch made introduction for me to a real estate agent who attends here, John Bost. I have been invited to lunch with the Clothing Closet Crew of volunteers, etc. I have gotten to be a part of the Healing Room ministry, staff lunch, Good Samaritan Ministry, and much more. Thank you all for welcoming me.

Today we think about the example of Abraham. Just as Abraham hurried to meet the Lord in the oak grove of trees at Mamre, Abraham offered rest,

water, a meal, and comfort to his guests. We too are called to welcome others into our midst, just as Jesus Christ welcomes each of us into relationship with Him. God may have brought you here to be welcomed into His presence at LakeRidge UMC. “Come ye who are heaven laden and I will give you rest.” God calls us through the Holy Spirit, and His son Jesus Christ, to welcome all people, in all places.

If you are searching for a place of welcome, I encourage you to call out to the lord Jesus. Confessing our shortcomings to Him, asking him to be the Lord and savior of your life. Christ desires nothing more than to welcome you into his arms. His loving arms. You are loved; you are cared for, you are welcomed into the body of Jesus Christ. If you would like us to pray for you, I invite you; we **welcome** you to come to the altar rail for the opportunity to pray for you.

As Christ welcomes you to relationship with him and this congregation of Christ followers, we also desire to welcome you into our midst.

Welcome to Lubbock, Welcome to LakeRidge, welcome to life with Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.