

Welcome

Beloved person,

When I returned to my parents' home as an adult after life had taken a turn I had not hoped for, my father and mother asked hardly any questions. My father would turn my bicycle upside down, because there was always a squeak somewhere that he could fix. My mother assumed I was hungry. Before I knew it, the previous day's meatballs were in the pan. Only much later did I understand what had actually happened. I did not have to explain a thing. My father fixed my bike. My mother warmed up the meatballs. That was their way of saying: *you are welcome. We are here for you. Always.*

My parents are no longer here. Yet, I have never lost the feeling of being welcome. How is that possible? It is as if they instilled something in me that is greater than themselves. Besides a warm home, they also gave me a secure foundation; the confidence that no matter how my life unfolds, I am never entirely on my own.

Perhaps that is one of the deepest human longings: to feel welcome. Not because you do everything right. Not because you have to prove yourself first. But simply because you are allowed to be here. Because you are so profoundly human. Simply human enough.¹

Not surprisingly, the story of the Prodigal Son has continued to move us for centuries. A youngest son asks for his share of the inheritance, sets off for a distant land and loses everything. When he returns penniless, his father sees him coming from afar. He does not wait, but runs to meet him.²

The son was able to return because there was a home to return to. Because there was someone who did not first call him to account, but welcomed him with open arms. That sense of unconditional acceptance - "I am here for you" - is perhaps one of the greatest gifts a person can receive. Those who know they are truly welcome are also able to welcome others. That which has been given to us, we can pass on. Not everyone has known such a home. Could we, too, be that place of welcome for them?

Viewed in this light, we want, as a community, to be much more than just a building or an organisation. A community is, above all, a place where you meet people you did not choose yourself. People who think differently, live differently, or come from a completely different background than you do. There may even be people among them with whom you would not readily strike up a conversation in everyday life, and the same may well apply the other way around.

Yet, together you form a community. You walk the path together, share in the joys and sorrows, find your way, and make decisions jointly; even when there is friction. It is precisely in this that a community can become a place of practice. A place where we do not give up on each other too quickly.

At best, such a community is a home. Not a home that holds people back, but a home where you can participate, grow, become yourself, and have the freedom to go your own way, confident that you are always welcome to return.

Each gathering can be a small example of the world we long for. A place where we allow ourselves to be moved by something greater than ourselves, and where the question is asked time and again: how can we, each in our own way, contribute to a more just and loving world?

Perhaps global connectedness does not start with the world at all. Perhaps it begins at the kitchen table, with the aroma of meatballs. With someone who makes you feel: you are welcome.

With a warm-hearted greeting,
brother Edwin de Wit, with input from sister Ineke Zwart-Gerritse



We remember those who have preceded us.

¹ Poem 'Precies Goed' (Precisely Right) by Babs Gons, from the collection *Doe het toch maar* (Just do it) (Atlas Contact, 2021).

² Freely adapted from a passage from 'Groter dan ik'. (Greater than me)