Welcome Week is appropriately named. The entirety of it is aimed at welcoming you into a place where previously you haven’t belonged. You were a stranger to this world and...

we’ve prepared a place for you,
opened our doors to you,
and escorted you into our University.

“Welcome to Baylor!”

Welcoming the stranger... “the other”... was a sacred obligation in the ancient days of the Bible. To make room for someone who was traveling, who was not a part of the family or community, was understood to be a sacred thing. In other words, it wasn’t just good manners, hospitality was a spiritual practice.

Part of the reason for that came from their past... they knew what it was like to be in a foreign land... to be the outsiders... and in desperate need of a place and the hospitality that came with it. But even beyond that, they also had a holy hunch that, “when they were entertaining strangers, they might be entertaining angels.” Open the door to someone you don’t know, who is different, who is in need... and God is likely to be in your midst. We need the other as much as they need us.

That’s the theology of welcome and hospitality that must guide us at Baylor. And remember, AFTER THIS WEEK YOU ARE ALL OFFICIALLY A PART OF THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE. In other words, now that you’ve been welcomed, received as the strangers you were, you must return the kindness. Say hello.

There are fellow students around you who’ll need someone to welcome them because they’re still lonely... maybe they don’t make friends easily or aren’t sure about being at a place like Baylor. Say hello.

Some of your fellow students will be different than you are. Can you offer them hospitality, make room for them? They’ll be from different countries, perhaps. Or have different beliefs or customs than you do. Say hello.

Some of your fellow students will make you uncomfortable.

They will challenge you or challenge your worldview.
Their personalities may rub you the wrong way.

Make a place for them in “your space,” in your heart, remembering that you need them as much as they need you. Say hello.

Welcoming is a sacred practice that aims to retrain us all because we all have instincts to avoid and even cast out what is different. WE ALL WANT TO BE EXCLUSIVELY WITH OUR “WE.” It’s the signature sin of humanity. Please don’t give into it. That sin is at the heart of all that ails humanity. Don’t give in. Practice hospitality. Say hello.

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