

## **The Friendly city?**

When the restrictions during the Covid 19 pandemic were initially lifted to allow outside exercise between 6 and 9 am, I took to the streets of our neighbourhood and our beachfront, enthusiastically joining many other disguised citizens in exercising our new-found freedom.

However, during the ensuing months a nagging concern started dawning on me. In my enthusiasm (and probably because I think it is the right thing to do), I consistently made a point of greeting everyone I met along the way, but my simple greetings of “good morning” or “goeie more” or “molweni” were met by surprisingly few responses in return.

What added to this concern was the experience that very few people, if any, took the initiative of greeting me first.

I do realise that there is a certain awkwardness in one stranger having to greet another stranger in a mask, that some might have missed my greeting because of earphones and that others might have been in conversation with their exercise companions. Nevertheless, I have been unable to shake the nagging concern that somehow these lockdown regulations seemed to have influenced some of us to become insular and unfriendly.

On the other hand (and fortunately), when I started raising this concern with friends and colleagues some actually reported a different experience in their neighbourhoods, where mutual greetings and kind conversation were the norm, rather than the exception. Is it just me, or have others had the same experience?

Are some neighbourhoods friendlier than others?

There was a time when ours was known as the friendly city.

The Oxford Dictionary defines friendliness as “the quality of being friendly; affability”. “Affability” is defined as “friendly, good-natured, or easy to talk to.”

The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the quality of behaving in a pleasant, kind way towards someone”.

So, what makes one neighbourhood or city friendly or friendlier than another?

We do.

Who is responsible for setting and raising the standard of friendliness and kindness in our city?

We are.

At the very least we owe it to one another and to the strangers who visit our city but ultimately, we owe it to God who positioned us as citizens in this city together with purpose.

Some may now be asking, so how important is this friendliness thing in light of other pressing needs such as illness, grief, hunger, unemployment and many other dire challenges that many of our fellow citizens are facing daily?

In response I can only echo the words of the prophet Micah who said: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Doing good, exercising justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God all start at the very least with an attitude of friendliness and respect for others around us.

Is friendliness enough just on its own?

On some occasions it could be. On many other occasions it should however lead to acts of kindness towards those in need.

At the very least, let’s start by making the effort of greeting one another kindly whenever and wherever our paths happen to cross.

In effect, by greeting someone I’m saying, “I see you and you matter”.

You matter to God and you matter to me.

That’s the kind of city I would like to live in. The kind of city I would love to visit.

My daily greetings continue and I have now even gone further by raising a hand to catch attention as part of the greeting.

It’s getting better.

Here’s the point: I might seem like a stranger to you, but think about it.

This mask I’m wearing, I’m actually willingly wearing it for your sake.

**Pastor Daan Botha: Harvest Christian Church**