

Sunday, June 30, 2024
Radical Hospitality *John 1:35-39*

1 Peter 4: 8, 9. "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace..."

Hospitality is our theme today, as we finish this month's four major themes of spiritual growth. 1. Cultivation of holy space within, 2. Accepting the work of failure and grief, 3. Awareness of Death shaped by God's life and now, 4. Everything we are and have as a gift from God to be held in open hands and given freely.

We can only practice hospitality if we know that we are cared for by God and that God will continue to care for us.

My friend tells of being welcomed by the family of a friend when she was in Senegal with the Peace Corps. She was dismayed when she left, that they caught one of their few chickens, tied its feet together, turned it upside down like a tote bag and happily pressed it upon her to take home with her on the bus. She was dismayed because she was being fed and taken care of by the Peace Corps, and the family had limited food resources. The family wouldn't think of not giving her a precious gift, and she carried home that radical hospitality still in her heart.

It changes us to receive hospitality that we don't deserve. Can we open our hearts this morning to God's hospitality? It takes humility. We want to say that we don't have anything that we haven't earned. When we kneel at the cross, our sins roll away, and our delusions that we are masters of our lives also fall away. Hospitality is freely given and freely received. It is not a commercial transaction, so it's not fun until you jump in.

American weddings and wedding receptions are a trip, aren't they? You figure location, number of guests, reception costs per head, and an invitation list carefully negotiated between, sometimes the sets of parents, sometimes the two getting married. Those negotiations prefigure what's coming in the marriage! Only those who are invited are allowed into the reception. The richer your family is, the more carefully non-invited are excluded, usually. These are reciprocal relationships. Value received in the past, value given now, value to be received in the future are calculated. It's a game of power.

Hospitality is freely given. But hospitality cannot be extended by the host without a strong sense of who they are and what they are sharing. Squatting in an abandoned house no one is

minding is different from being welcomed into a place, however humble, that is someone's home. Just letting people do whatever they want with you and your life is not hospitality.

There are three generations of hospitality in this passage.

John the Baptist shared his calling, his insight into Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. We don't associate John the Baptist with a residence or possessions because he lived in the wilderness and wore simple, sturdy clothes. He was an Old Testament prophet, announcing the coming of the Messiah, with a following. John stood with his disciples and watched Jesus walk by, the third day after he knew who Jesus was. Without hesitation, John fulfilled his calling, crying out, "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" Without hesitation, his disciples moved over and followed Jesus.

Later John struggles in prison for telling the truth to Herod, wondering if Jesus, who is not taking care things as John expected, really is the Messiah. When John is beheaded, Jesus eulogizes him this way. "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" *Matt 11:11* Each of us, living in the last days, the days of grace and mercy following the resurrection and giving of the Spirit, can be the least in the kingdom of heaven, but we may be called upon to give up our popularity with a word pointing people to Christ. Any of us who have a reputation, feel ourselves to be effective and useful, not to mention have possessions, hold it all in an open palm. That is not our identity. All came from God and is given away for Christ.

Christ walks by, turns around and speaks to the disciples John has released to him. Christ has his heart open, "*What do you seek?*" The disciples want to know who he is, what he is like. "*Rabbi, where are you staying?*" Jesus lived in such a way that there was nothing to hide from others. He has lots of private time with God, but nothing to hide. He can invite people home at the tenth hour, ten hours after 6 am in the Roman count would be 4 pm. If it was the Sabbath, his guests would have to stay until sundown on Saturday. "*Come and see.*" Jesus opens up his life and character freely. Jesus is an adult without a home, so he would be staying with friends. What would Jesus' room be like? Did the women of the home do the cooking for these disciples or did Jesus? We know that Jesus could start a charcoal fire and grill fish (*John 21:9*)

The disciples, one of whom was Andrew, take the first step of hospitality, which is to receive humbly and freely. Andrew next brings his brother to receive the hospitality of Christ. Soon, the disciples will be learning to hold their own hearts and lives open, and to give freely without counting the cost. This is the path of hospitality that we cannot avoid as followers of Christ.

Resources

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Gospel. Fortress, 2015. pp. 53-59, 82, 83.