

Walking with Jesus in Hospitality

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Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Colin Ross

[0 : 00] I'll turn now to the reading from Scripture, and there are two readings. So the first is Romans 12, verse 13.

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. And Luke chapter 14, verses 1 to 14.

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There, in front of him, was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.

Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

Then he asked them, if one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out? And they had nothing to say.

[1 : 03] When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, give this person your seat. Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place. Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

[2 : 15] Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

This morning, we're going to look at the theme of Christian hospitality, and we're going to look at those two passages that I can read for us earlier on in the service.

I don't know about you, but in an increasingly technical age, we are noticing that though technology has brought us so much connectivity, we're also experiencing much more detachment from our community than we have done in the past.

We have windows into the lives of others through social media, but probably we haven't been invited into the house of most of our social media connections in the past five years.

As a society, we are lacking connections that matter. As a society, we are increasingly isolated and lonely, yet we're a society that longs for meaningful connections.

The desire for meaningful connections is something which we all share. It is part of our human makeup to want connection, to want relationships, to want community.

[3 : 37] As Christians, we also love community, and we love to connect with others. We see community and relationships as gifts to be celebrated and enjoyed, but we also see community and relationships as pointers to the God who actively pursues relationship with us.

And so this morning, we're going to explore together this idea of hospitality. And to do this, we're going to look and find what biblical hospitality is.

Then we're going to think through how hospitality is not an act, but it's who we are, and how hospitality is really a heart matter rather than a home matter.

And then finally, I'm just going to think through how we can be hospitable, even in a rather inhospitable environment that we find ourselves in.

So first off, let's think through what biblical hospitality is. As Cornerstone, we are a church that prizes our community and the people of our community.

[4 : 48] And one of the best ways we can show this is through hospitality. In that verse we read in Romans 12, we're called as Christians to be hospitable.

We are to show hospitality. Now, the hospitality that the Bible encourages was not the hospitality of the great dinner party, where you carefully tablescapes and craft the evening to ensure that your guests are astounded by your dinner party repertoire and fall in love with charming and delightful stories about your countless safaris, parties and nights out.

All of this is done so that others know just how wonderful we really are and to ensure that somehow our guests would feel obligated to assist if ever the need arose as they had been so wonderfully entertained by us.

That is not what we're talking about here. Hospitality to Paul, the writer of Romans, was something utterly different. Christian hospitality is about displaying the heart of God and not about displaying how great you are.

It's about making the stranger a friend and providing them a place where they feel at home. It's all about reflecting the qualities of the God who had come to the ancient Jewish peoples as they lived as outsiders in the land of Egypt and to the God who then welcomed them into a new home, a home which flowed with milk and honey.

[6 : 30] In other words, a home which had abundant provisions for all that they needed. For those of us who are Christians this morning, this too is our story.

God saw us as those who were outside of a loving relationship with him. And God was so moved that he came towards us and welcomed us into his home where he provides a great banquet for us to enjoy.

And if you're not yet committed to following Jesus, this is the story we want to share with you. That you too can come and find a seat at the banquet table which God has prepared for his family.

So our Thursday thought, the one thing I really want us to remember is this. Hospitality starts in the heart, not in the home.

Hospitality starts in the heart, not in the home. To help guide our thinking on how hospitality starts in our heart, we're going to look at that second passage that Ian read for us and how Jesus taught about hospitality being something, not that we do, but something which is about who we are.

[7 : 58] Jesus taught about hospitality and how hospitality is not a thing we do, but it is more about who we are. So I really want us this morning to look in these two verses in Luke 14.

And the two verses are 12 and 14. So let me just read them to us again as a reminder of what Jesus said. Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours.

If you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. The passage that was read to us is all about Jesus at a party, surrounded by great food and some exclusive guests.

You can just imagine the smug feeling that the host felt when Jesus accepted the invite to the party. Jesus is pretty broke.

[9 : 12] He's not going to bring great gifts, but he's got that stardust quality about him, which will help persuade a few more significant folks to show up for me at my party.

Alas, Jesus turns into a really uncomfortable guest. First off, he has a go at the guests for all trying to take the best seats. Then the passage we read is all about his rebuke to the host regarding his guest list.

Jesus takes the man to task for not inviting the poor, the lame, the crippled, and the blind. Rather, he has filled his home and his guest list with the folks who are just like him and who he could use for his own benefit now or in the future.

You see, the fantasy struggle, the host of that party struggle is our struggle today too. How many of us have internally constructed a guest list so that we would benefit ourselves in the long run?

Oh, I want to make a connection with her because I hear that she's really good at babysitting. Oh, but this friend is really good at DIY so let's invite them around.

[10 : 27] Let's get to know them so they can help me put up that shelf which keeps falling down. Or, I really find this person easygoing and great to be around.

Let's invite them rather than fill in the blank about the awkward guest which causes a bit more effort on your part. But, you know, when we act like this we're objectifying people.

We're using them. We're treating them like some kind of vending machine. I put my money in and let's see what I can get out of them. We need to turn from this way of thinking and acting and aim to live in such a way where we reflect God's generous and loving character.

Where we don't manipulate people or use them like tools for our own happiness but where we honour all people and recognise their worth. As God's children we must remember we had nothing to offer God and that God chose to love us generously not because of any benefit to him but simply because he loved us.

If you're a Christian this morning you may instinctively get this but still struggle to reflect it. Our struggle is the same as the Pharisee.

[11 : 54] I like the people who are like me. I want to hang out with my friends and family and that is good and yes, there's absolutely a place for that. You see, when we read that passage we hear the words of Jesus and he says do not invite your friends, your brothers, sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours.

I mean, what? Is he just wanting us to hang out with all the people that we don't like, that we're not like, that we're far from? No, he's not demanding that we cut off friends and family because we know that Jesus loved his family and loved hanging out with his friends at the dinner table.

What Jesus is doing here is simply using exaggeration as a teaching technique to ensure that our hospitality isn't limited to those of our friends and family but it's much more expansive than that. It goes way beyond those who others wouldn't actually take notice of. That our hospitality is more than our close friends and family but it's inclusive of all people.

I was reading a few stories about hospitality and about how churches do hospitality over the last little while and I was really struck by an example I read about the Soma community who are a group of churches in Washington State.

[13 : 25] They were trying to make connections with their neighbours and they were finding that inviting their neighbours for a kind of round a couple of times a year you know the usual kind of Christmas time come round or have a lot of barbecue in the summer that having such large gaps between meeting friends in kind of meaningful ways or meeting neighbours in meaningful ways wasn't really helping them connect well wasn't really kind of oiling the wheels of community and so they kind of took the fairly bold and radical step of having a weekly gathering for their close friends and neighbours and so what they found was that because they moved from a kind of twice yearly gathering to a weekly gathering that they found that they began to know the felt and real needs of their community and because they were increasingly getting to know their community and what their struggles and what their joys were that they were much more able to explain how Jesus can speak into their situation much more meaningful ways now this was hard and it's costly it takes time and it takes money but you know it reflects

Christian hospitality it reflects the heart of Jesus it reflects the heart of God and so I was challenged by that story myself and I'm challenged to kind of make more of an effort to regularly meet the neighbours who are on either side of me so we're going to start small and hopefully we can build up a small community just getting to know and being intentional and being really focused on trying to create great friendships with those who are in my near neighbourhood and we hope that one day as we go on that the frequency will increase and maybe one day we can invite them back inside and we hope that comes really soon God's heart is characterised by hospitality it is welcoming and it is loving it takes those who feel far off into close relationship with him

God's heart was fully revealed through the sending of Jesus into our world Jesus left the great banquet of heaven and lived as an outsider in this world so that we could become friends with God and take a seat with him at the banquet of heaven if you hunger for that kind of welcoming love it can be yours to enjoy through the work of Jesus he wants to welcome you home so we've seen what biblical Christianity is it reflects God's generous and loving heart we've seen how it starts not in the home but in our own hearts and finally let's think about how we can be hospitable today and this is one of the great things about following Jesus is that when we follow Jesus he frees us up to show hospitality with the huge diversity of people that surround us developing relationships based on love over reciprocating relationships you see hospitality is grace in action it's part of our calling to reflect the love of God to all people hospitality is about developing meaningful connections with others and then connecting them to

God imagine if you were isolated and lonely in our community today would you want a charity to drop off some food and some basic supplies or would you want someone to come and sit down and enjoy a meal and start a meaningful connection with you our calling as Jesus followers is to do more than simply write checks but it is to make meaningful possible connections all around us there are opportunities for connections even within COVID when you go for a coffee with a colleague or you go and say hello to the new person at work and invite them for a coffee you are building friendships but you're also on mission when you're a good neighbour and take that extra moment to enjoy their chat even when you're rushing around trying to get off to your next appointment when you're doing that you are living in

God's mission you are preparing the way for them to connect with Jesus as you go for a walk with your friend you are making connections and connecting them to Jesus when we serve others let's be careful not to treat outsiders as projects to be completed but friends to be enjoyed we're not looking to provide our own lives with meaning or accomplishments in an act of horizontal transcendence when we see all others as equals and as friends we have begun to grasp what biblical hospitality is for some of us though christian hospitality might not be an inconvenience but it might simply be impossible at this time there are seasons in life where reaching out and actively building friendships with others is impossible and your calling if this is your situation is to be hospitable to those who are always in your home to enjoy the opportunity to deepen a few close relationships rather than moving out and developing new relationships developing genuine friendships based on love and not based on getting anything in return will be blessed by god as it says in verse 14 hospitality is costly it costs our money it costs us in terms of our comfort and it costs us in terms of our time but we know that god will repay us at the resurrection we will receive our happy reward an eternal place in his heavenly home where we will feast and celebrate with [20 : 22] Jesus and the family of god in conclusion christian hospitality starts in our hearts and not in our homes let us love others like jesus did and seek as rosaria butterfield would say to make strangers into neighbors and neighbors into the family of god amen amen