

Luke 24:13-16, 28-35
Sacred Art of Hospitality #2
Welcome a Stranger, Welcome Christ
WRCoB 7.16.23

It was the poet Maya Angelou who said

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Church hospitality doesn't depend
On well-chosen words or gestures.

It doesn't depend on selecting the right people
For a Welcoming Committee.

Visitors don't come back to churches
Because of what we said or did
But because of how we made them feel.

Church hospitality depends solely
On the integrity, sincerity and authenticity
Of the community of faith.

We are to be real!
Anyone can see through superficial hospitality.

If you radiate warm hospitality
The visitor is going to feel it big time.

And I guarantee that not only
Will they remember how they felt entering your church
But you'll remember it too.

The author of Hebrews writes

Hebrews 13:2 NRSV Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

As with last week's Scripture Lesson

When we witnessed the extravagant hospitality
Shown by Abraham and Sarah to three strangers

We also witnessed the strangers sharing good news
Of the forthcoming miracle of birth

We see there is reciprocity in showing hospitality.

If nothing else

A feeling of satisfaction in welcoming a stranger.

In an article featured on NPR that raised the question
"Do you want to feel happier today?"

The article recommended

Try talking to a stranger.

Many of us tend to do just about anything to avoid conversation or even eye contact with strangers. And smartphones make it easier than ever to do that.

A recent study found that phones can keep us from even exchanging brief smiles with people we meet in public places. But a body of research has shown that we might just be short-changing our own happiness by ignoring opportunities to connect with the people around us.

Several years ago, [two researchers at the] University of British Columbia tested whether short conversations with strangers could lift moods. They asked participants to enter a busy coffee shop and grab a beverage — half would get in and get out, and half would strike up a conversation with the cashier.

The people who turned the economic transaction into a quick social interaction left Starbucks in a better mood. They even felt a greater sense of belonging in their community.

The article goes on to say that other research
Has shown train commuters who interacted with others
Experienced a more pleasant ride.

Another researcher says even brief eye contact
Increases a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Zherina, my daughter, says everywhere I go
I'm saying hi, smiling, and greeting people.

I strike up conversations in the check-out line
In the elevator, on the street
Waving to people from the car.

She gives me "the look"!
And says I'm cringy.

I don't know, I just like doing it.

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In today's lesson
Two disciples broke into a conversation with a stranger
With a stranger on the road to Emmaus.

When they got to their destination

They invited the stranger into their home.

They, unknowingly, ended up welcoming Christ to their table.

And what a blessing!

Luke 24:32 CEB They said to each other, “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?”

Welcome a stranger, welcome Christ (say it with me)

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Today we continue looking at the sacred art of hospitality.

Dictionary.com defines hospitality as

The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.

But, as I was saying, we see hospitality working both ways.

We see Janet Brunk’s receptions following worship

As a wonderful gesture of hospitality.

She sees doing them as a tremendous blessing.

Throughout the Gospels

We see those who welcomed the stranger, Christ

Blessed by the encounter.

From his stay in Peter’s home in Capernaum

Where he healed Peter’s mother-in-law

And Zacchaeus' home in Jericho
Which Jesus invited himself over

To Mary and Martha's home
Where Jesus spent many evenings.

All of them were enriched by their hospitality.

Though, I will say, not all the homes Jesus entered
Showed hospitality to him.

There was one occasion mentioned in Luke 7
A Pharisee invited Jesus over for dinner

We are not sure of his motivation
But perhaps a gesture of hospitality.

Jesus was at the table
When a woman of ill repute
Entered the home and came up behind Jesus

Crying, she began to bathe Jesus' feet with her tears.
And drying them with her hair

The host berated Jesus for allowing her to do such a thing.

And Jesus' response?

Luke 7:44-46 CEB "Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn't give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair.

45 You didn't greet me with a kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. 46 You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet.

The woman

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So, what does hospitality look like today?

Does it mean constantly inviting people over for meals?

For some, yes, it may mean that.

But it is also a lifestyle

That strikes at the core

Of what some call the loneliness pandemic.

Our society hungers for community!

As the derivative forms of hospitality suggests

Hospitality is more than inviting someone over for dinner.

Here are some related words to hospitality.

- Hospice—a place for the sick and dying
- Hostel—a place of refuge
- Hotel—a place to sleep
- Hospital—a place of healing
- Host—someone who cares for physical needs

Each word suggests aspects of hospitality

I see several ways we can be hospitable in today's world.

1. **We are to be a welcoming presence.** We are to be kind and friendly to everyone we meet. (can you play this link?) https://youtu.be/CELZcKNoB_g Offer your name and ask for theirs. At the very least, you will have better service. At the very best, you gain a friend. Jesus welcomed strangers and outcasts, extended a word of encouragement. We are too.
2. **Remember hospitality works both ways.** In the Scripture Lesson today the two who reached out and engaged in a conversation with a stranger was blessed by the presence of Christ.
3. **Actively engage others,** not by inviting them to church at first. That's a big turn off. Probably the last thing you want to do. And don't engage people only by text or email but do a face-to-face. Meet for coffee. Join them at the playground with your children. Invite them to a nonconfrontational event.
4. **Invite them over or take them out to eat.** Much of Jesus' teachings took place around the table. Food and fellowship are good stuff!! I know buying lunch for someone is a bit costly. But it won't be forgotten.
5. **Pay attention.** Many keep ear buds in while they walk, run, or exercise. But they miss all kinds of opportunities to engage people. We need to bear in mind that people around us, at work, school, church, and our neighborhoods may be hurting. Be attentive, show kindness to others. An uplifting word or kind action may change someone's life forever.
6. **Be a Refugee** whatever that might look like. Be a good listener, an advocate, a safe haven.

Hospitality to everyone is Christianity's signpost.

A signpost pointing to the Master of Hospitality, Jesus.

If you think about it, hospitality is THE mission of the church.

To show love to our neighbor
A stranger, a visitor, or a guest.

You might ask
If Jesus is the Master of Hospitality
How did he show it?

He didn't even have a home?

Jesus' hospitality was of the heart not of the home!

Jesus had no place to lay his head
But everywhere he went he showed hospitality.

He showed hospitality at the wedding in Cana
When he provided the very best wine.

He showed hospitality with five loaves and two fish
And fed the multitudes.

When his followers grew tired and discouraged
Jesus showed hospitality by offering himself

He said, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened
And I will give you rest".

In a rented upper room, Jesus expressed hospitality
When he fed his disciples bread and wine
A symbol of his sacrificial love

And by giving his life upon the cross of Calvary
Jesus showed the fullest expression of hospitality
By making right our relationship to God.

And in that great act of hospitality
 Jesus prepared a way for us
 To enter into our eternal heavenly home

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Like Jesus who had no home
 Hospitality doesn't require a home so much
 As it requires a heart.

We can welcome visitors, guests and strangers
 By opening our hearts.

So, they feel welcomed, loved, cared for
 Nurtured and valued.

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Now, in a church full of introverts
 Expressing hospitality is not so easy

It can be a stretch
 Forcing us out of our comfort zones.

But the reward of welcoming a stranger
 Is no more and no less

Then the reward of welcoming Christ himself.

Revelation 3:20 NLT “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”