

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

A WAY OF LIFE

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PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING
SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

Winter 2008

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 1 – Introduction to Biblical Hospitality



Abraham Receives the Three Angels, by Rembrandt

When we think of 'hospitality', what comes to mind?

- Entertaining family and friends?
- Martha Stewart?
- A laborious chore?
- Something done by only a few, with no lasting consequences?

The degree to which any of us reduce hospitality this way is the degree to which we have lost a Biblical understanding of the holistic impact of Christian hospitality. Martha Stewart didn't invent hospitality. More radical still, she hasn't perfected it either. Hospitality as presented to us in the Bible is not merely a practice. Instead, it is a way of life; a whole life view of the coming of God's Kingdom that offers us a uniquely Christian ethic. It is comprehensive, all-encompassing, exhilarating and challenging. The purpose of this course is to ***begin*** exploring this wondrous aspect of our faith in the hopes that many of us might come to see hospitality as a crucial element of Christianity that greatly informs and empowers us in God's service.

To that end, we will spend the first few weeks discussing broad biblical principles and getting into Scripture itself as part of establishing a working grid. The latter half of the course will be spent exploring how this Christian hospitality grid plays out in street-level issues such as evangelism, the youth culture, the immigrant community, and issues of race.

There are a number of key concepts we will touch on throughout this course. If some of these surprise you a bit, don't worry. Part of what it means to newly discover a Christian perspective on hospitality is to challenge and even undo cultural understandings that might be normal, but are not necessarily biblically informed.

Key Concept #1: Christian hospitality, as given to us in the Bible, is a sacred *process* of 'receiving' outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests.

Whether it is Abraham receiving the three angels (strangers) in Gen. 18, the Midian priest taking in Moses in Ex. 2, Rahab allowing Joshua's spies to stay with her in Josh. 2, or even Nehemiah extending hospitality to a random trumpet player in Neh. 4, the Old Testament (OT) is full of examples of hospitality being extended to strangers who become valued guests both during their actual time together, and beyond. The New Testament (NT) is no different. The Samaritan woman invites Jesus the stranger to stay with her community, which he does (John 4). Paul (Saul), who had previously been not only a stranger but vicious enemy of the Christian movement, is taken in by the apostles in Acts 9. Later in that chapter, it is said that Peter stayed with a tanner named Simon during his time in Joppa. In the above cases of Nehemiah and Peter in particular, it is worth pondering why seemingly obscure and even immaterial details about who stayed with whom are included in Holy Scripture. Perhaps it is because such accounts are not immaterial at all either to the biblical authors or to the actual people involved. This should tell us something.

But does this mean that when we extend what we think of as 'hospitality' to family and friends, we're in fact doing something other than hospitality since these folks are not 'strangers'? Not necessarily. In our context, we need to understand that there are very few people in our lives who are not 'strangers' in one way or another. Think about it – how many people, even family members and close friends, do we know so well that they can no longer surprise us at all? And more importantly, how many of our family members and close friends remain strangers with God? Every time we extend hospitality to friends and family who are not in right relationship with God, we are participating in a process of (hopefully) changing a person's status before God from stranger to guest through the direction of the Holy Spirit. And even with family and friends who are saved, hospitality can be a time of nurturing and deepening that all-important relationship, much like the story of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1.

Key Concept #2: Hospitality is not a specialized spiritual gift that only a few people possess.

While it's true that some may be 'better' at hospitality than others, everyone has a stake in it. As Peter is teaching 'the elect' about what it means to exercise spiritual

gifts in this last age, he tells God's people to 'offer hospitality to one another without grumbling' (1P 4.9). Peter draws no distinctions between believers when it comes to exercising hospitality – it is a command that is applicable to all Christians. Paul likewise gives his audience in Romans a blanket command simply to 'practice hospitality' (Rom 12.13). The force of the Greek is clear that the Christian is not called to simply show hospitality to others grudgingly, but to actively 'pursue' hospitality. We must resist the temptation to point to 1Tim 3.2 and Tit 1.8 and think that 'being hospitable' is the unique responsibility of elders in the church and doesn't really apply to the rest of us. To the contrary, in listing the qualifications for elders, Paul is drawing upon the universal appeals for hospitality that are applicable to all of God's people. That a hospitable spirit is one qualification for eldership in the church merely reinforces the importance of hospitality in the church at large. This means that churches should never be in the business of marginalizing hospitality ministries.

Key Concept #3: There is an indispensable moral component to Christian hospitality.

The act of offering welcome is basic to Christian identity and practice. For most of the church's history, Christians located hospitality within a vibrant tradition in which needy strangers, angels, and even Jesus were welcomed, and through which people were transformed. It is undeniable that in the ancient world, hospitality was viewed as a pillar upon which the moral structure of society rested. Hospitality addresses the physical needs of food, shelter, and protection. But hospitality also radically affirms the high worth and common humanity of all people. Table fellowship is an extremely important way, even today, of affirming the equal value and dignity of people. Historically, Christian hospitality was a subversive act that obliterated societal barriers involving gender, race, economic condition, and citizenship status, and also directly attacked the often deadly devaluing of the personhood of 'undesirables'. The extension of hospitality was a moral statement with moral overtones that offered a dramatic and often effective witness to the world and was crucial to the growth of the early church. In this course, it is my intention to get us all thinking very seriously about the kind of unbiblical societal barriers that are alive and well in our day, and how Christian hospitality might once again be a joyfully subversive answer to the social crises of loneliness, isolation, marginalization, and the devaluing of human life.

Key Concept #4: The entire Christian life can be seen through the grid of Incarnation and Hospitality.

'Incarnation', following the example of Jesus as given to us in John 1 and Php 2, is the act of proactively entering into the world of others. We do this in an attempt to relate to them, understand them, be a friend to them, and witness to them. 'Hospitality' is the flip side of 'Incarnation'. Hospitality is the act of inviting other people into our

world, in order to accomplish the same things. When we invite our neighbors to church, we are asking them to enter our world in the hopes that they might discover Jesus and their need for a Savior, and become part of the Christian family of the forgiven. When we invite our neighbors into our homes, we are likewise inviting them to enter our world and see Christianity in action in the home, warts and all. As we will see later, hospitality is inextricably linked to evangelism and mission precisely because the invitation to experience the presence of Christ in our homes and churches is part of a robust theology of evangelism and making disciples.

Key Concept #5: Hospitality cannot be separated from the coming of God's Kingdom both now and at the end of history.

The Gospels clearly announce that God's Kingdom has arrived in its infancy with the first coming of Jesus (Mt. 12.28, 21.31; Mk 4.11-30, 10.14-15; Lk 4.43, 6.20, 8.1-10, 16.16, 17.20-21; John 3.3-5). The Gospels record Jesus beginning to fulfill the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the OT, which were clearly meant to demonstrate that both the Messianic King and his Messianic Kingdom had arrived, and that the time was now to repent and believe. It is no accident that throughout all four Gospel narratives, hospitality was greatly stressed and was often the occasion through which key Kingdom events took place (the Wedding at Cana, the foot washing of Jesus, the Last Supper, the woman at the well story, etc). But hospitality is not only linked to the initial in-breaking of God's Kingdom into history; it is also the grand picture through which the consummation of all history is presented. Repeatedly in Scripture, the consummation of the Kingdom is presented as a great banquet feast. Jesus himself described the Kingdom this way multiple times (Mt. 22, Luke 13.20, 14.15). The great marriage feast of the Lamb in Rev. 19 depicts the feast of final victory and eternal peace between God and his people that resembles Ps. 23.5. Put simply, one cannot think biblically about God's Kingdom, heaven and eternity without accounting for how hospitality is integral to the biblical presentation of all three realities.

In the coming weeks, we will see these concepts at work between fellow humans. We will see that hospitality is an accurate cosmic understanding of how God, through Christ, relates to his creation. Contra Martha Stewart, we will see that this kind of hospitality is often messy, despite being holistically Kingdom centered. But we will also see the end goal of all this – perfect communion between God and his people, with God being the bountiful Host presiding over a grand feast in which his people (his guests) joyfully partake. Many of the social crises we are all too familiar with are intended to be largely remedied in the Christian ethic through hospitality. This strongly moral dimension to Christian hospitality is largely missing from the cultural practice of hospitality, and it is a dimension that the church has gradually lost as well, to the detriment of society as a whole and to the expansion of God's Kingdom.

Questions to Prayerfully Ponder and Act on:

- 1) To what degree has my understanding of hospitality been shaped by cultural norms rather than biblical norms? Why does it matter either way?
- 2) Do I consider hospitality to be a specialized ministry that others do, or do I consider it to be integral to the life of the church and every believer? Why?
- 3) In what ways does/should the moral dimension of hospitality tangibly play out in my own sphere of influence? What unbiblical societal barriers might God be calling me to reverse through hospitality?
- 4) How does the vision of the Kingdom as a great banquet inform our present day attitudes and acts of hospitality?

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 2 – Hospitality in the Old Testament



Elijah Receiving Bread from the Widow of Zarephath, by Giovanni Lanfranco

We're going to devote this week to discussing Old Testament (OT) hospitality. We will conduct a brief and very incomplete survey of OT texts that touch on matters of hospitality. As indicated in Wk 1, this course is only a beginning when it comes to exploring what Scripture has to say about hospitality and what it means for us. This lesson should not in any way be construed as covering all of the OT texts that pertain to hospitality. To conduct such an examination might take months on its own. What we hope to do this week is equip us with a working, albeit simplistic grid of what the OT has to say about hospitality, and to provide a good starting point for those wishing to do more research and exploration on this topic in the OT. It is in this lesson that we will begin to see that hospitality is a concept that transcends specific actions and settings, and impacts basic overriding attitudes that exert global influence.

Just so we're all clear, a study of hospitality in the OT is absolutely essential for us as NT Christians. Without launching into an extensive discourse on the Reformed view of the covenantal continuity of Scripture (take one of Bob Barnett's Reformed Theology classes to get a good dose of that!), let's simply say that the OT was Jesus' Bible, and the NT was written within an OT framework. As we will see, much of what the NT teaches regarding hospitality has its origins in the OT, so it is imperative that we try to tackle what the OT has to say in order to better understand the NT.

The immense volume of data in the OT makes it very difficult to neatly summarize the OT's teachings on hospitality. I am going to offer you a way of organizing the OT hospitality data that I have developed which I think is fairly sound and provides a decent grid that we can work with. But my proposal is far from perfect.

The Major Hospitality Theme in the OT: The 'Alien'/Sojourner Motif

The 'Alien'/Sojourner Motif Established in the Pentateuch:

The story of OT hospitality, in some ways, begins with Abraham. He was a sojourner in the land (Gen 23.4; Heb 11.9) and is regularly depicted in Genesis moving from place to place. Abraham became the prototype for hospitality in Jewish culture. The story of the visitation of Abraham by three angelic strangers in Gen. 18 became a model for Jewish hospitality. In this account, Abraham, in the heat of the day, ran to greet the strangers and refreshed them with food and drink. The hospitality of Abraham the sojourner becomes a model for the Jewish nation that saw itself as a pilgrim people in the mold of the Abrahamic line (Ex. 6.4; Deut 26.5-22; Ps. 105.23).

In the OT Law, the Israelites were repeatedly commanded to remember what it was like to be aliens/orphans in Egypt and how it felt to be strangers in the land (Gen. 15.13; Ex. 2.22, 18.3) who were ultimately delivered by a God who was leading them to a bountiful land they would call their own. God repeatedly instructs the Israelites to do likewise to the orphans around them (Ex. 22.21, 23.9; Lev 19.33-34; Deut 10.19, 23.7). Here we see both the moral dimension of hospitality and its universal applicability to the nation as a whole.

Importantly, the OT Law seems to make a crucial distinction between different kinds of strangers, or 'aliens', and this distinction then determines whether the Israelites would be hospitable to them or not. On one hand, the protections of the OT Law applied not only to Jews, but to the 'aliens' among them (Lev 24.22, Num 9.14, 15.16, 15.29; Deut 1.16, 24.17, 27.19; Josh 20.9). Most revealing is Num 15.15, which says that because the same Law applies to both Jews and 'aliens' in their midst, they will be the same in God's sight. The manna from heaven feeds Jew and 'alien' alike. God loves the 'alien' and provides for him (Deut 10.18; Ps. 146.9). But on the other hand, this idea stands side by side with the disdain of foreign practices that were hostile to God and the repeated OT admonition to have nothing to do with such things.

It seems as if a distinction was made between 'aliens' who wished to become part of God's covenant community (Ex. 12.48-49) and were to be hospitably welcomed and treated well (Ex 23.12; Lev 19.10, 23.33, 25.35; Deut 5.16, 14.29, 24.14-21), versus those 'aliens' who actively opposed God through their attitudes and practices (Deut

12.30-32, 18.9-14, 20.18, 29.16-18). Hospitality is not extended to the Canaanites or the Philistines, but rather, warfare and destruction.

The Motif Played Out in the Historical Books:

The OT Historical Books (Judges-Chronicles) offer us a window to see how the hospitality instructions of the Pentateuch translated into blessing and cursing in the history of the Jewish nation. Clearly, the story is more of failure than success, given their eventual exile from the land. But there are some bright moments.

Consistent with the Law's command to be hospitable to godly strangers, the widow of Zarephath offers bread to the starving Elijah in 1K 17. There are at least two things that are notable about this account. First, it is God who directly commanded the widow to offer hospitality to Elijah. This reveals God's heart for hospitable provision for his people, just like during the exodus and wilderness wanderings, as well as in preparing for them a land flowing with milk and honey. The hospitable character of God doesn't change. Second, the obedience of the widow is remarkable, given that the land was in a period of unprecedented drought and food was extremely scarce. Further, we learn in v12 that the widow had a young son to feed as well. Yet, she responds rightly to the divine Voice and gives food to Elijah the stranger. The widow is supernaturally blessed by God by having her flour and oil jars not go empty for the remaining duration of the drought.

Other notably positive OT events with hospitality overtones involve the ministry of Elisha in 2K 4. In this chapter, a well-to-do woman offers abundant hospitality to Elisha the sojourner. The woman is blessed with a child as a result. At the end of the chapter, Elisha miraculously feeds 100 men in the midst of a great famine in an event that clearly previews the later feeding of the 5,000 during the ministry of Jesus.

In these stories, we see both divine and human faithfulness on display through the rubric of hospitality. Importantly, we see hospitality extended not when times are easy and blessings are abundant, but when times are trying and blessings seem meager. The faithfulness of human hospitality is conducted amidst frailty and desperation, and it evokes the covenantal faithfulness and sovereign favor of God. Hospitality is clearly in the mix in terms of understanding divine blessing in the OT.

But unfortunately, the picture the Historical Books give us of the people of God is long on human unfaithfulness, and we can see this within the rubric of attitudinal hospitality as well. Nathan uses a hospitality parable to pronounce judgment on David's adulterous/murderous affair (2S 12.4). In defiance of the Law's repeated admonitions not to hospitably fraternize with idols and detestable practices, the people repeatedly succumb to idol worship and pagan practices. Things eventually

get so bad that in 2K 21, King Manasseh of Judah is said to have led the nation into greater evil than any of the pagan nations that had been destroyed by God for their sin (although, see 2Ch 33 for a rehabilitated version of Manasseh). Where God had commanded inhospitality toward the enemies of God, the people instead hospitably welcomed them and their practices. The result was decay into gratuitous sin that brought about their exile and the destruction of the temple. Moreover, the Bible shows the inhospitality that was extended to the divinely commissioned prophets of God who rightly warned of judgment if the people did not repent. Neh 9.32 and Luke 11.47-49 graphically describe the persecution of God's faithful prophets at the hands of God's own people in the days leading up to the exile and beyond.

The people and especially their leaders had turned the hospitality teachings of the Pentateuch on their head. Instead of showing hospitality to those who were faithful to God, the prophets were shown the door, or worse. And instead of disassociating from those who actively undermined the Law of God, the leaders often welcomed them in and the people embraced their practices, thereby inviting divine judgment.

Hospitality in the OT Poets and Prophets:

The nation saw itself as guests of God on Earth (Ps. 39.12). The idea of God as the great Host, inviting and entertaining his people as guests at the consummation of the Kingdom is prominent in the poetical books (Ps. 23.5 – both hospitality and inhospitality are on display here) and the Prophets (Amos 9.13-15; Joel 3.18; Is. 14.1, 25.6-8). Is. 58.7 declares that hospitality is greater than fasting, and in the midst of his torment, Job cites his hospitality as an example of his righteousness (Job 31.31-32). Jeremiah describes God's seeming forsaking of the people in hospitality imagery (Jer 14.8). The importance of hospitality to the heart of God is intensely displayed in Ezk 22.7,29, where God declares that Jerusalem's mistreatment of the 'alien', in direct violation of the Law of God, is one reason why he sent Babylon to destroy the city and send the people into exile (cf. Ps. 94.6; Jer. 7.5, 22.3). A refusal to extend hospitality in defiance of the word of the Lord is shown to be a high stakes game.

Hospitality in the Post-Exilic Restoration Period:

Much of what we have observed thus far is repeated in this last chronological phase of the OT. Zech 7.10 reiterates the desire of God to see his people treat the 'alien' well (7.10) and not oppress him. But once again, we find in Mal. 3.5 a lament about the renewed abuse of the 'alien'. Further, we once again find in Ezra 9 a lengthy account of how hospitably fraternizing with those who oppose God's Law is frowned upon rather than celebrated. Hospitality is just as much about attitudes as actions.

The OT teaching threads the needle between two extreme viewpoints that are common in our day. To the view that 'strangers' and 'aliens' are unwelcome and should be shunned without distinction, the OT confronts us with God's Law that directly and repeatedly contradicts this view. But to the view that everyone should be welcomed without discernment, the OT confronts us with the tragic history of the Jewish nation that resulted from a lack of boundaries that came from a desire to find human favor rather than strive for godly faithfulness. In the OT, hospitality is an instrument not only of caring and provision. It is also an instrument of discipleship for both host and guest, often within the context of community. Through the proper application of OT hospitality, the attitudes and practices of both host and guest were to be conformed to the Law of God, and covenantal fidelity to its Author would increase. When the application of hospitality deviated from this framework, infidelity increased, along with substantial abuse and mistreatment of others. This is a theme we will find in the NT as well. We are seeing that hospitality is not just about practice; it's about much larger attitudes. Put simply, hospitality, however it looks in our lives, is indeed a way of life that can frame, for good or ill, attitudes and practices that extend far beyond the dinner table.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

- 1) In what ways am I welcoming attitudes and practices I should be shunning, and in what ways am I shunning attitudes and practices I should be welcoming? What does this say about the hospitality approach I've adopted in my life?
- 2) Am I prone to gravitate toward one of the contemporary extremes mentioned in this lesson, and if so, which one? In what ways has the OT Biblical data challenged my present posture, and what am I going to do about it?
- 3) How does the hospitality story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath speak to our contemporary age of stingy materialism and immodest consumption? Where does the church tend to fall along this spectrum, and what does this say about the condition of the church in America?
- 4) Do you believe the words of the Prophets apply to us today, and does your reception of their warnings show a spirit of hospitality or inhospitality?
- 5) Who are the 'aliens' in your midst, and how does your reception of them line up with the OT's vision?

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 3 – Jesus as Stranger, Guest, and Host



The Last Supper, by Juan de Juanes

This week, we focus squarely on Jesus in the four Gospels. Like last week, we cannot hope to cover every hospitality-related passage in the Gospels that pertain to Jesus. There's simply too much material. For example, I have elsewhere proposed that the entirety of the Gospel of John can be seen as one big thematic presentation of hospitality (see my unpublished *The Johannine Doctrine of Hospitality*). We will cover only some of that ground today.

This lesson is going to require from us some mental flexibility. The idea that Jesus was a stranger, and that his roles of guest and host were often quite fluid (see Appendix), are not facile concepts and can sound a little inventive – maybe too inventive. However, what I'm presenting to you is quite well attested not only in the Biblical data as we'll see, but also in NT scholarly opinion, including evangelical scholarship. My hope is that by the end of this lesson, though we might be a little confused and even perplexed, many of us will see that we have been introduced to a very exciting new way of thinking about our Savior that is wondrous, awe inspiring, and fabulously complements and deepens our present understanding.

Jesus as Stranger

This is a crucial concept, and it is two-pronged. First, Jesus entered this world as a stranger. Second, he explicitly identified himself as a stranger.

Regarding the first prong, the Prologue of John's Gospel (John 1) makes clear that Jesus, the divine Word and the true light, entered our dark world, but the darkness did not understand him (1.5), nor did the world recognize him (1.10). From the perspective of the world, Jesus was a stranger, someone altogether unfamiliar. This idea can be extended to Matthew's account of the virgin birth, where in a very physical and intimate sense, Jesus was a stranger to both Mary and Joseph. The idea is plain. Even though it is through Jesus that all things were made (John 1.3) and hold together (Col 1.16-17), thereby making him the ultimate Host over all creation, he tabernacled among us as a stranger.

Why is this important and what does this have to do with hospitality? The second prong flushes out the significance – Jesus the Stranger identified himself with strangers of the world. Matthew 25.34-46 is a seminal passage in the NT in understanding Jesus and hospitality. Matthew 25 became to the early NT Church what Gen 18 was for Jewish culture – an overarching theme passage for Kingdom conduct with hospitality at the center of the pinwheel. It is here that Jesus says:

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, ***I was a stranger and you invited me in,*** ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, ***you did for me.***' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ ***I was a stranger and you did not invite me in,*** I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, ***you did not do for me.***' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Several points of application can be gleaned here:

- 1) Jesus identifies himself with strangers.
- 2) Service to strangers is equated with service to Christ himself.
- 3) The reward for being hospitable to strangers is Kingdom inheritance.
- 4) The penalty for inhospitality to the least of these is eternal punishment.

The radical claim of Jesus is that hospitality to the vulnerable and desperate stranger is a defining mark of a saved believer – an essential characteristic of one who is part of God's Kingdom and is loyal to its King, Jesus the divine Stranger. Those who treat strangers as strangers rather than inviting them in as part of a process of changing

them to valued guests are entirely out of step with the Matthew 25 ethic. This is very challenging teaching that not only turned 1st Century societal norms on their head, but does the same in our society today. Here we see most vividly the moral dimension of hospitality and its cosmic impact on both physical and spiritual matters.

Jesus as Guest

In this section, we will focus on some of the Gospel accounts of Jesus being a guest of others. At the outset, we should point out that Jesus continues the OT sojourner motif we saw last week in Abraham. Mt. 8.20/Lk 9.58 depicts the Incarnate God as having no fixed home on the earth he created and sustains. Numerous other passages (Mk 1.39, 6.6; Lk 8.1, 9.6, 9.52-56) depict Jesus and his disciples traveling from village to village. The importance of hospitality is self-evident in the life of Jesus.

Mt 9.9-13/Mk 2.15-17/Lk 5.27-32 – this episode depicts Jesus as a guest of Levi/Matthew, a tax collector. During dinner, other tax collectors and 'sinners' came and also ate with Jesus. The Pharisees take exception to Jesus eating with undesirables, but Jesus retorts that he has come to call sinners.

Mt. 8.28-34/Mk 5.2-17/Lk 8.27-37 – this episode depicts Jesus in the Gadarenes healing a demon-possessed man. Jesus hurls the demons into a herd of pigs, who then go mad and die. Of importance to us is the reaction of the town. Instead of welcoming someone who healed a demon-possessed man who had haunted them and inviting Jesus to stay with them, the residents instead beg Jesus to leave their land.

Mt. 13.53-58/Mk 6.1-5/Lk 4.23-24 – this episode depicts Jesus being rejected in his 'hometown'. We said earlier that the OT sojourner motif is alive and well with Jesus, and part of why this is true is because he is disbelieved in the place where he grew up. He is not received, he is not welcomed. Instead, he is rejected, and Jesus restrains his ministry among them because of it.

Lk 7.37-50 – Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee. A sinful woman proceeds to wash Jesus' feet, causing the Pharisee to take offense. Jesus then points out that the Pharisee host greatly disrespected Jesus his guest by neglecting virtually every hospitality custom of the day, while the 'sinful' woman upheld them and honored Jesus in the process. The woman's sins are forgiven.

Lk 10.38-42 – Jesus is invited by Martha into her home, which is shared by her sister Mary. While Martha is busy with hospitable preparations, Mary chooses to listen to Jesus' teachings. Martha gets upset at Mary's seeming negligence of the work of the house and appeals to Jesus for relief. Jesus lovingly instructs Martha that hospitality isn't just about making grand (to the point of extravagant) preparations, but is most

exemplified by proper respect and attention to one's guest, which is something that can be clouded in the fury of preparations and worry. This is a tough passage, and it is often assumed that Martha gets something of a bum rap from Jesus here. But John 11 is most instructive in showing that it is Martha who ultimately utters two of the most marvelous professions of faith found anywhere in Scripture (Jn 11.21-22, 11.27). Martha learned the lesson that Jesus teaches her here in Lk 10.

Lk 14.1-14 – Jesus dines at the house of a prominent Pharisee in which other Pharisees are also present. The text indicates that Jesus was being closely watched by the Pharisees, so Jesus uses this occasion to miraculously heal and to instruct. Of note for us are Jesus' instructions to both the other guests at the meal, as well as to his host. He instructs the guests not to clamor for places of honor at the table, but for the lowest places out of humility. He then instructs his host not only to invite friends and rich neighbors, but the poor and other undesirables. Blessing and resurrection are linked to this kind of hospitality.

Lk 19.1-9 – Jesus asks to dine at the house of Zacchaeus the tax collector. The text says that Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus 'gladly', despite the grumblings of the people. Zacchaeus proceeds to give half his possessions to the poor and to repay 4 times anyone whom he has cheated. Jesus announces that salvation has come to his house.

Jn 2.1-11 – Jesus is invited to a wedding at Cana, where he eventually turns water into wine in what I (and others) regard as a brief preview of the great marriage banquet of the Lamb in Rev 19. It is noteworthy that the first of Jesus' miracles is performed within the context of hospitality with him as someone's guest.

Several points of application can be gleaned from this brief survey of Jesus as guest:

- Jesus freely dined with 'respectable' people in society as well as the 'undesirables' of society. In the case of Zacchaeus, Jesus proactively seeks an audience with him.
- Jesus was frequently rejected and treated shabbily by those who did not like the way in which he upset the normal order of things.
- In many cases, Jesus uses his status as guest to impart Kingdom teaching.
- Jesus celebrates those cases where his hosts understand who he is and are prepared to follow his teachings.
- Jesus frequently comes to the defense of those whom society looks down upon, and frequently warns and chastises those who have achieved societal respectability. Jesus tells his hosts to proactively include the excluded in the blessing of hospitality.

We will focus on three cases in the Gospels where Jesus is clearly a host for the people. Two of these episodes will be familiar; the third less so.

The Feeding of the 5,000 (Mt 13.13-21; Mk 6.30-44; Lk 9.10-17; Jn 6.1-14):

There are several things of note here. First, hospitality is extended to the masses without regard for their spiritual condition or any other distinctive. We know from the end of John 6 that not all people who were blessed by this miraculous feeding followed Jesus in the end. Yet, the omniscient Jesus extends hospitality to them anyway. The same dynamic can be found in the foot washing episode of John 13, where Jesus extends hospitality to Judas knowing full well his imminent betrayal.

Second, it is through this miraculous feeding that Jesus sets the stage for one of his most striking teachings, that Jesus himself is the Bread of Life (Jn 6.35-40, 48-51). Like the manna from heaven, it is God, through Christ, who gives the bread of heaven to all those who come to Christ as desperately hungry. Jesus the Host provides tangible bread to feed the stomachs of the people, but this bread also points to an even greater sense of Jesus as Host – that he is the very bread of life who eternally feeds his people and they do not perish.

Lastly, the miraculous nature of the feeding is not to be overlooked. We have already begun to see the critical aspect of divine surprise in hospitality that we will examine more closely in coming weeks. Hospitality is the grid through which the miraculous comes to visit us, and we see God at work in very unique ways. There is a supernatural component to Christian hospitality that we abandon or minimize to the detriment of the Kingdom.

Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7):

Here we find one of the most extraordinary and overlooked extensions of divine hospitality anywhere in the Bible. At the Feast of Tabernacles, the Incarnate God who has tabernacled with humanity as its guest now extends the invitation of a host to guests who are in need of water. Sources of water were common places for hospitality to take place (Jn 4, etc). Here, Jesus is declaring himself to be the source of living water, and is hospitably inviting all to drink (7.37-38).

Notice that Jesus is extending this invitation at the temple, which is, of course, God's House on earth. Jesus is assuming the role of divine Host at his own house where the people have come to congregate. Notice also that Jesus extends this invitation in the midst of opposition. The chapter is sprinkled with references to some people wanting to kill him (7.1, 19, 25, 30, 44), some thinking he's demon possessed (7.20), while others thinking he is a deceiver (7.12). Yet, just as with the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is extending universal hospitality anyway. And like the

feeding of the 5,000, the people end up divided about who he is, with many choosing not to accept Jesus' invitation (7.40-44).

The Last Supper (Mt 26.17-30; Mk 14.12-26; Lk 22.7-38):

This familiar story contains themes that by now are familiar to us:

- 1) Hospitality is extended universally to include even Jesus' betrayer.
- 2) Jesus ushers in the New Covenant invitation through the context of a meal. Here, Jesus completes his teachings in Jn 6 about being the bread of life and encouraging his people to drink his blood to remain in him.
- 3) Jesus is said to have 'eagerly desired' to eat this meal with his friends. Once again, we see Jesus as a proactive Host who enjoys hospitable fellowship with his people.
- 4) As with the Wedding at Cana, the Last Supper is a preview of the great Kingdom banquet in which the Kingdom is given to those who persevere (Lk 22.29-30). Once again, a biblical vision of Kingdom cannot be separated from biblical hospitality.
- 5) Jesus the Host is offering all of himself to his guests. Jesus is at once a humble and powerful Host. In humility, Jesus as host serves rather than being served; gives rather than takes. In power, Jesus the host has the standing to offer unprecedented blessings through the offering of himself to his guests.

Summary: Some Practical Applications

We have covered a lot of ground in this lesson, and we have many data points upon which to heavily reflect. Allow me to offer some practical applications from what we've seen from the life of Jesus:

- When interacting with 'strangers', we should proactively be seeking Jesus the Stranger who directly linked himself with the strangers of this world, and respond accordingly.
- Jesus the Guest emphasizes courteous and sustained attention. Guests feel valued and appreciated when their hosts pay attention to them not just in outward preparation, but in conversation and personal attention. This is a vitally critical lesson for us – do not neglect your guests on the altar of hospitable upkeep. Show a vibrant interest in your guests by making time for them, and like Jesus' hosts, you will be surprised at what you discover.
- Jesus the Guest emphasizes uncomfortable hospitality that extends beyond the safe zones of family and friends. Jesus the Host practices what Jesus the Guest preaches, by extending hospitality not only to strangers, but even to enemies.
- Jesus the Host is an eager and proactive host. He is not grudging in his extension of hospitality. Rather, he takes great joy and longs for the fellowship

with his people that he alone can consummate. Hospitality, though difficult and sacrificial, is a joy, not a burden.

- Jesus the Host is a selfless host. By offering himself as the permanent and eternal source of hospitality, Jesus is not quick to erect barriers or miserly mete out the degree to which he is willing to be inconvenienced by his guests.
- Jesus the Guest is a blessing to his hosts, and Jesus the Host is a blessing to his guests. That is the way we should see ourselves and should seek to embody in our own hospitality settings. Blessing and Kingdom cannot be separated, and as we've seen, both thoroughly encompass hospitality.

There are many more practical points of application for us from the life of Jesus, and I would enjoy hearing what kind of application points each of you have taken from this all too brief study.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

1) How does the idea of Jesus as Stranger impact my understanding of my Savior?

2) Jesus' linking of himself with strangers and his teaching to treat strangers the way we would treat Jesus himself seem self-explanatory and very important. The early church certainly thought it was highly important. Does the church today reflect this urgency, or consider this ethic to be central to its mission? Why or why not, and why does it matter?

3) We've seen that Jesus the Guest sometimes rebuked his hosts when they were in serious error. Does that mean we should feel free to follow the example of Jesus and correct and instruct our hosts when we are their guests?

4) Jesus extended hospitality even to those he knew would treat him poorly and would ultimately reject him. What are the implications of this in my own approach to hospitality?

5) How has my view of God's Kingdom been impacted by our study of hospitality?

6) How does Jesus' authority when he was a guest play into my understanding of the innate power structure between host and guest? In other words, does Jesus encourage the idea that the host, by virtue of being the host, has a certain power 'over' his guest, or is the dynamic more egalitarian? Why is this important to think about?

Appendix – The Fluidity of Jesus' Hospitality Roles

This appendix is for those who wish to dig a little deeper in exploring who Jesus is within the grid of hospitality. The study we've just completed proposes that Jesus was a stranger, a guest, and a host. But we must be careful not to treat these three roles as mutually exclusive, or think we can look at each hospitality episode in the Gospels and easily slot Jesus into one of these three categories. It often doesn't work that way. In digging a little deeper on this subject, we discover that Jesus' hospitality roles were often fluid and varied even within the same hospitality encounter. To demonstrate this, we will focus on two events recorded in the Gospels.

Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4):

This episode is critical in seeing the hospitality motif as it relates to outreach to outsider groups and communities. The Fourth Gospel has by far the most developed narrative concerning the ingrafting of the Samaritans into the following of Jesus. This is an extraordinary act of hospitality on the part of Jesus (as indicated by the inhospitable reaction of the disciples (4.27)). Jesus approaches the woman and asks for a drink. Like the Gen 18 event of Abraham being visited by angelic 'strangers', Jesus is the divine stranger in this account. Like Abraham, the woman, and later on, the entire community extends hospitality to Jesus by first giving him a drink (this is admittedly an inference on my part), and then eventually inviting Jesus and his disciples to stay with them as their guests for two days (4.40). Of all people, it is the Samaritans, the ultimate outsiders, who are portrayed as being in the same mold as Abraham regarding their hospitable reception of a divine visitor.

But Jesus is not only a guest in this story. Jesus' offer of living water to the Samaritan woman is a clear mark of Jesus as Host and the woman as guest. In addition, Jesus breaking down the exclusivity of temple worship is the clear invitation of a Host to an excluded people that they are no longer cut off from true worship of God. As an aside, it is noteworthy that Mt. Gerizim is mentioned in this exchange, since in Jewish tradition, Mt. Gerizim had become associated with Zeus, and the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim had once been renamed 'the temple of Zeus, the God of Hospitality'. Jesus is showing the woman who the true God of hospitality is here. The woman, and later the Samaritan community, receives the hospitality of Jesus, and the ingrafting of the Samaritans into the Kingdom begins.

Jesus is a guest of the Samaritans throughout the whole episode, but at key places in the narrative, Jesus becomes the inviting and uniquely powerful Host and the people become his guests.

The Emmaus Story (Lk 24):

In this post-resurrection account, Jesus encounters two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. During their walk, the two individuals do not recognize Jesus, even after Jesus walks them through the Scriptures to demonstrate how all the Scriptures ultimately testify about himself. As they near the village, the two individuals insist that Jesus stay with them as their guest because it is getting dark outside. Jesus accepts their invitation.

However, once at the dinner table, it is Jesus the supposed guest who we find giving thanks, breaking bread, and serving it (24.30). This is extremely unusual as a matter of custom, and tells us that even though Jesus is ostensibly a guest of his two followers, he has in fact become the Host. It is at this point that his followers' eyes are opened and they realize that Jesus is the guest in their midst. At that moment, the resurrected Jesus disappears.

Some things of note. First, it is significant that v35 specifically links the opening of their eyes to Jesus breaking bread. It indicates the importance of hospitality in the recognition of truth. Second, it also demonstrates that Jesus was really the Host all along in this story. It is through the power of Christ in the act of breaking bread at the meal that the impact of his discussions with the two followers on the road to Emmaus became clear and comforting. It is Christ the Host who was in control of when and how his followers' eyes would be opened, and they subsequently realize that throughout their walk, Jesus was comforting, encouraging, and caring for them the way a host would. The fact that this eye-opening moment occurred while Jesus was their guest does not negate the role of Jesus as Host during the whole episode.

Summary:

Jesus is a stranger, a guest, and a host, and sometimes he is all three in the same biblical account. It should be noted that each time Jesus functions as Host, his ultimate point of reference is to himself as the great divine Host of all creation who is consummating all of history because he is the Lord of all. In this respect, Jesus never totally ceases being Host even when he was a stranger and guest during his earthly ministry. What this means is that during his first coming to Earth, Jesus was a stranger and a guest. But because he is the great divine host of the cosmos who is consummating all of history, his second coming to Earth will fully be of him as Host, with all of his people becoming his eternal guests.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 4 – NT Hospitality



Parable of the Great Banquet, by Johann Christoph Weigel

Last week, we focused on actual hospitality events in the life of Jesus. This week, we discuss the rest of what the NT offers us concerning hospitality. As before, we will not be able to cover all the biblical data, but don't worry. Some obvious hospitality teachings in the NT, such as the Good Samaritan parable, will be covered in another lesson before the course is over.

We are going to organize the NT data around some key themes:

- Hospitality and Gospel Transmission
- Hospitality Openness, but also Boundaries
- Hospitality and Eschatology (last things)
- Hospitality and Divine Surprise
- Hospitality and the Poor

This is not an exhaustive list that summarizes all of what the NT teaches regarding hospitality. These topics are also not mutually exclusive, but often interdependent. We've already touched on a number of these topics in previous lessons, and we will explore them in more detail here.

Hospitality and Gospel Transmission

No serious discussion of the NT's presentation of the spread of the Gospel can ignore the issue of hospitality. During the lifetime of Jesus, the Gospels explicitly link hospitality with the proclamation of the Gospel:

Mt 10.5-42; Mk 6.7-13; Lk 9.2-6, 10.1-17 – these are accounts of Jesus sending out the disciples and others to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. Throughout these accounts, there is an emphasis on entering homes and eating and drinking with hosts who receive them. The disciples are to take no money with them on their journey, because the hospitality of the people to whom they proclaim the Good News is assumed. However, it is also noteworthy that Jesus gives them instructions for how to handle rejection. The implication is that the greatest news ever given will not be received by all. This is completely consistent with what we see in John 1, as well as what we saw in the Feast of Tabernacles story of John 7 last week. The disciples return reporting many wonderful things. They are witnesses to, and agents of Kingdom power.

The book of Acts is an extended historical account of the growth of Christ's church, and episode after episode shows hospitality as integral to this growth:

Acts 10.24-48 – this is the pivotal story of Peter at the house of Cornelius. Cornelius anxiously invites Peter to his home while staying with a tanner in Joppa (9.43). Once in Cornelius's home, Peter testifies to the truth of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit visits the house and the Gentiles present are saved and subsequently baptized. Peter stays with them for several days.

Peter and Cornelius are mutual strangers in the context of hospitality. Peter is a Jewish Christian, and Cornelius is a Roman centurion. They represent different cultures, different allegiances, different histories, and different peoples. Yet, hospitality is the bridge that overcomes these differences and becomes the avenue through which God's salvation begins extending to the Gentiles in force. Hospitality is the setting through which the Gospel spreads.

Acts 16.11-15 – this is the Paul and Lydia episode. Upon her and her family being converted and baptized, she invites Paul to stay with them, which he does. Note that Paul's acceptance of Lydia's offer of hospitality confirms his belief in her certain salvation.

Acts 16.29-34 – the Philippian jailer story. Paul and Silas are in prison, the earth shakes, and the prison doors open, yet no one attempts to escape. The startled jailer is eventually presented with the Gospel message and he responds. His family is

baptized as believers, and he hosts them in his house with a fine meal after washing their wounds.

Acts 17.1-9 – Paul (presumably) stays with Jason while preaching the Gospel in Thessalonica, and uses Jason's home as a base of operations for his activities in the city. Notable here is the character of Jason, and the price he pays for extending hospitality to Paul.

Acts 18.24-28 – here, hospitality is the setting for effective discipleship. The overly eager Apollos is lovingly counseled by Priscilla and Aquila in their home. The result is that Apollos becomes a very effective evangelist.

Acts 28.1-10 – here, Paul is shown hospitality by common islanders on Malta after a shipwreck. After being uninjured from a poisonous snake bite, word spreads about Paul. Eventually, the high official Publius invites Paul to his home, where an island-wide healing of disease begins.

Acts 28.13-14 – here, Paul and his companions are taken in for a week by fellow believers in Puteoli. Of note here is how fellow believers minister to a surely weary Paul through hospitality. It is from here that a refreshed Paul embarks for Rome to spread the Gospel further.

It is abundantly clear that hospitality enabled the transmission of the Gospel in the early church. Nothing has changed. We should be asking if our own loss of understanding and practicing hospitality as a means to spread the Gospel is one reason why the Gospel is not spreading in our culture the way it did in Acts.

Openness and Boundaries – The Case of 2 and 3 John

I have written much more extensively on this elsewhere (see my *Hospitality in the Johannine Epistles*, soon to be published). Here, we will be brief.

2 John:

This is a tough and often obscure little letter, and readers are sometimes shocked by its tone. Here, we find the Elder giving uncompromising and seemingly harsh instructions to a local church. They are instructed not to welcome traveling teachers who the Elder believes are spreading false doctrine. The issue of trying to protect churches from the infiltration of false teaching was not unique to this church. 2 Tim 3.6 and Titus 1.11 both demonstrate how live a threat this was to other churches as well. But still, the instructions of vv10-11, not to mention the rhetoric of v7, might seem excessively harsh and hardly hospitable. 2 John is often a ripe target for

scholars who allege that we find a regression in Christian ethics from the love of neighbor ethic of Christ. So what are we to make of this?

3 John:

The situation is complicated further by what we find in 3 John. Here, the Elder condemns Diotrephes for seemingly following the instructions the Elder had given his audience in 2 John – turning away traveling teachers. But while Diotrephes is condemned (vv9-11), Gaius is praised for welcoming these teachers (vv3-6), and hospitality is affirmed (v8). What's going on here?

Put simply, what we see is a fluid yet unmistakable concept that hospitality involves both openness and boundaries. It is an approach that is faithful to reality. It acknowledges that while we are to be open and welcoming, we are not to do so indiscriminately, because there are very real and harmful threats in a fallen world. Here, the threat is the infiltration of false teaching and who and who not to receive, and it's a threat we take seriously today as well. It's why not just anyone is allowed to teach in the church, and why there is oversight over the teaching ministry by those qualified to be overseers.

But there are other threats as well. We don't welcome known sexual predators to work in our nursery (see Gen 19). We don't harbor violent criminals in our homes. We must be extremely careful about the lines we draw that fence our extension of hospitality. It is not to be done flippantly, and Scripture doesn't give us a point by point checklist to go through when making such decisions. But as we've seen from 2 and 3 John, Scripture does give us some general precedents that can guide us (see also 1 Cor 5 & 11). And while we've seen that the general scale of Scripture favors openness, it doesn't do so exclusively. Scripture's hospitality instructions are balanced by an awareness that threats are real, and when known, should not be given a platform to harm or deceive others under the cover of hospitality.

Hospitality and Eschatology

Rev. 19 is where we find the great marriage banquet of the Lamb. It depicts the great feast of victory and final reconciliation. Rev 19.9 uses the language of hospitality in blessing those who are God's invited eternal guests. It should be self-evident that the consummation of the Kingdom being presented as a banquet feast in Scripture stresses the importance of hospitality to God. He is a hospitable God to his people, and as Rev 7.9 and 15.4 stress, God's hospitality extends to people from every nation and tribe.

But as we saw with 2 John, the hospitality picture in Scripture is not just about openness. There are boundaries too. Regarding the banquet of the consummation,

we see such boundaries clearly in Ps. 23. Ps. 23.5 brings openness and boundaries in hospitality together. Here, God is preparing a great banquet for David right in front of his enemies. There is nothing they can do but watch the banquet from the sidelines and not partake. As we will see shortly, the banquet parables of Jesus have this same dynamic.

Hospitality and Divine Surprise

We saw last week that Jesus identified himself with strangers and the less fortunate in Mt. 25. The enticing lesson from this passage is that when we welcome the least of these and treat them as valued guests, it is Christ himself we are welcoming. There is an element of surprise in hospitality, where the heavenly hosts are present in our extension of hospitality.

This idea is further amplified by Hebrews 13. Here, we are told not to forget being hospitable to strangers, because some have discovered that they were actually entertaining angels unawares. This idea almost certainly draws from the Gen 18 account of Abraham being visited by angelic strangers. In numerous hospitality accounts in the life of Jesus, surprise is a major theme. Whether it's surprise about Jesus' identity, surprise by what he says or does, or surprise by miraculous events taking place, it is clear that supernatural surprise in otherwise routine hospitality settings is a recurring theme.

Such a theme is not relegated just to Bible times. Many Christians who specialize in hospitality and have made it their primary ministry focus (ie: L'Abri) often remark about the element of surprise in hospitality that they believe can only be supernatural in nature. Unexpected divinely arranged friendships and timely fruitful connections come about from hospitality. Provisions of food and clothing extend far beyond what was originally thought possible. Seemingly intractable hatreds give way to love and forgiveness. Put simply, God shows up in hospitality settings, and the miraculous occurs in our midst. For those who continue to look for miraculous signs of God's power and presence in this age, they should consider the role hospitality plays in these manifestations, and ask if the loss of hospitality in our day has anything to do with the lack of Kingdom power we often lament.

Hospitality and the Poor

We've touched on this topic periodically, and it will be a theme throughout the course. Again, drawing on Mt. 25, it is obvious that Jesus expects his people to be hospitable to the poor, and it is a point that is graphically illustrated in Lk 16, where the consequences of neglecting the needs of the poor Lazarus come to visit the rich

man. The relation between hospitality and the poor is expressly described by Jesus not only in Lk 14.1-14 as we saw last week, but in the parable he teaches to the same audience in the same chapter:

Lk 14.15-23 – Jesus tells a Kingdom parable about a man who prepared a banquet and invited many join him. But instead of accepting the invitation, they all made excuses not to come. Upon hearing this, the master instructed his servant to seek out the poor from both the town and countryside and invite them to the meal. Those who declined the invitation are excluded.

The parable describes the extension of the Gospel to those deemed unworthy by the Pharisees. That Jesus does this through the imagery of extending hospitality to the poor is no accident. It is a Kingdom reflection of the tangible instruction Jesus had given just previously to the host to invite the poor into his home, rather than just 'important' people. Why should the host do this? Because it is a reflection of what the Kingdom itself looks like.

James is also relevant here, and likewise draws from the Lk 14 episode we studied last week. In James 2, James presents a theoretical scenario of both rich and poor people coming to a meeting. James denounces any attempt to play favorites by exalting the rich while demoting the importance of the poor. James does this by discussing good seats versus bad seats at the meeting. To give the good seats at the table to the rich just because they're rich is to engage in evil thoughts (v4). The point is clear. James, drawing from the Lk 14 teachings of Jesus not to covet the good seats at the table, demands that hospitality be extended in equal measure to rich and poor alike.

Summary

The following is a summary of some main points the NT gives us regarding hospitality, and some practical applications from them:

- 1) Hospitality fosters reconciliation. When we consider the divisions within the church and within families, hospitality is something we should embrace as a remedy to these crises.
- 2) Neglect of the poor is a serious sin, and the church will be (is being) judged for it. Hospitality is an avenue the NT prescribes to minister to the poor, and break down unbiblical barriers.
- 3) The Great Commission is achieved in part through hospitality. This was true in the NT, and it's true in our day too. A neglect of hospitality reflects a neglect of Kingdom purposes.

4) God shows up in miraculous ways through hospitality. We should expect to be joyously surprised by God when we engage in faithful hospitality. Such surprise renews our hope, our joy, and enriches our walk with Christ by virtue of improving our spiritual eyesight.

5) While hospitality is about welcoming and being welcomed, this will not be so in every case. Our hospitality will sometimes be rejected. We cannot let this deter us any more than Jesus let his rejection deter him.

6) There are responsible limits to our extension of hospitality. We shouldn't look for excuses to withhold hospitality, but we shouldn't be naively blind either. Christian hospitality is not intended to give enemies of God a platform to wreak havoc in the home or church. Discernment is an important element of biblical hospitality that is ignored at our peril.

Next week, we will begin discussing actual hospitality in the home and church. It is here that we will focus on the Pauline corpus and attempt to take the principles we've gleaned so far and apply them responsibly.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

1) In what ways do I need to be more open in my extension of hospitality? In what ways do I need better boundaries?

2) Am I beyond being surprised in my faith walk? Do I really believe that God supernaturally shows up when 2 or 3 are gathered in his name (Mt 18.20)?

3) Do I play favorites in my extension of hospitality? If so, how am I rationalizing it? Is this a problem?

4) Do I think there is a link between hospitality and the transmission of the Gospel and care for the poor? What does that link look like in my life?

Appendix – Calvin on Hospitality

It often goes unnoticed that John Calvin had quite a bit to say about hospitality in his writings. Much of what he says is very relevant to us today. He offers us a robust view of hospitality that can help us reclaim a working biblical and theological prism for incorporating hospitality into our world and life outlook. A sampling of Calvin's thoughts:

"No duty can be more pleasing or acceptable to God" than hospitality to religious refugees. Such a practice is a "sacred" form of hospitality. *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, Vol. 1, 484.

While Calvin's sentiment was no doubt driven in part by Reformation-era persecution of the emerging Protestant movement, there is clearly some present-day applicability as well. When Pastor Bob and his family hosted Elder Murat from Kazakhstan last summer, they were squarely in the midst of living out Calvin's appeal for hospitality to 'religious refugees'. The Barnetts, according to Calvin, were conducting a 'sacred' practice, pleasing to God.

Calvin laments the deterioration of Christian hospitality even in his day:

[Hospitality] has nearly ceased to be properly observed among men; for the ancient hospitality celebrated in histories is unknown to us, and inns now supply the place of accommodation for strangers. *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 340.

In response, Calvin saw hospitality within a solid moral and theological prism:

Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, "He is a stranger"; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Is. 58.7). Say, "He is contemptible and worthless"; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does not deserve even the least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions. *Institutes*, 3.7.6

[God] has impressed his image in us and has given us a common nature, which should incite us to providing one for the other. The man who wishes to exempt himself from providing for his neighbors should deface himself and declare that he no longer wishes to be a man, for as long as we are human creatures we must contemplate as in a mirror our face in those who are poor, despised, exhausted, who groan under their burdens...If there come some Moor or barbarian, since he is a man, he brings a mirror in which we are able to contemplate that he is our neighbor. *Corpus Reformatorum: Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 51, col. 105

Regarding the poor person, Calvin says that in viewing such a man,

we should think "now I have been in that condition and certainly wanted to be helped; indeed it seemed to me that people ought to have pitied me in order to help me"; But what [is the usual case]? When we are comfortable, it is not a matter of our remembering our human poverty, rather we imagine that we are exempt from it and that we are no longer part of the common class. And that is the reason why we forget, and no longer have any compassion for our neighbors or for all that they endure. *Calvin's Sermons on the 10 Commandments*, 127.

Calvin is developing a doctrine of hospitality not only from the Scriptures (notice how Calvin applies Mt. 25 to us), but from the theology of shared human experience and the *Imago Dei*. In particular, Calvin is quite distinct from other theologians in stressing social disconnections in his appeals for hospitality, believing that great harm results from the absence of relationship. As in our day, the social crises of isolation, suffering, loneliness and hopelessness were prevalent in Calvin's day as well. By advancing Christian hospitality as a major remedy to these maladies, Calvin was well ahead of his time in establishing a broad basis for mutual human respect and care that provide a strong precursor foundation behind the modern recognition of human rights. For Calvin, hospitality and its moral dimension is a key ingredient to developing a uniquely Christian ethic.

Calvin goes on. In answering the perennial question 'Who is my neighbor?', Calvin says:

Christ has shown us in the parable of the Samaritan that the term 'neighbor' includes even the most remote person (Luke 10.36), [and therefore] we are not expected to limit the precept of love to those in close relationships. *Institutes*, 2.8.54

Getting to the heart of the matter, Calvin offers this penetrating and challenging statement:

Let us beware that we do not seek cover for our stinginess under the shadow of prudence. *Sermons from Job*, 202

Calvin offers this statement in a discussion about appropriate levels of scrutiny and inquiry regarding our generosity to strangers. While Calvin was concerned about hospitable people being taken advantage of, he insisted that inquiry should never be "too exacting". Instead, inquiry should be conducted with a "humane heart, inclined to pity and compassion."

In all of the above quotes, we get a glimpse of Calvin the theologian, and especially Calvin the pastor. Calvin offers a very relevant word to us today regarding the moral and theological dimensions of hospitality, and urges us to reclaim our own heritage radically and comprehensively.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 5 – Hospitality in the Home



"If there is room in the heart, there is room in the house."

In the last 4 weeks, we have surveyed the biblical data regarding hospitality. We have done this with the expectation that Scripture can and does provide us with workable godly principles that should inform our present day engagement with the world via hospitality. It is now time to respond to what we have learned.

Beginning this week and throughout the remainder of the course, we will begin exploring how Christian hospitality looks in modern day to day living. Today, we talk about hospitality in the home. More specifically, we are going to talk about hospitality from the standpoint of host. This might immediately raise the question of what hospitality looks like without a home to practice it in. This is a fascinating topic to consider, and in the appendix to this lesson, I offer some of my thoughts for your consideration regarding hospitality and location.

My hope is that in studying the biblical data these last 4 weeks, all of us, to some degree, have had our preexisting postures regarding our hospitable engagement with the world challenged. Hopefully, this neither surprises nor scares us. Part of what it means to be Reformational Christians is believing that even Christians are in constant need of constant reform by constantly subjecting our beliefs and practices to what the Scriptures teach. If you have been challenged by what we've covered in the last 4 weeks, that's a good thing even if it might be uncomfortable or unsettling. It means you're reforming rather than vegging, which means you're being faithful to your theological tradition. As we now move out of the abstract and squarely into the tangible, you will likely feel even more challenged. I'm not asking you to agree with what will be presented in this and future lessons. But I am asking you to soberly and prayerfully consider it.

Hospitable Homes are Welcoming Homes

Relationships and Prayer:

As we learned from the Lk 7 story of Jesus at the home of a Pharisee, opening one's home doesn't automatically mean that one is being hospitable. A welcoming home is one in which the host provides a setting that acts as a sanctuary for one's guests in the deepest sense of that word. A welcoming home doesn't just provide physical shelter; it also provides the shelter of relationships – the most important relationship being with Christ. This means that welcoming homes are homes of prayer, where the host invites Christ to be present through the Spirit so that guests who are not in right relationship with God might, through the process of hospitality, join us as valued eternal guests of Jesus our Host.

Food and Drink:

As we've seen throughout our study of the Bible, food and drink are central to almost every act of hospitality. Welcoming homes are those that offer provision to weary guests. In Bible days, guests were often physically weary from traveling. In our day, guests are often emotionally weary from excessive busyness. While food and drink refresh the physically weary guest more than the emotionally weary guest as a matter of biology, we err in underestimating the emotional renewal that comes with enjoying a meal with others. Particularly in our hyper-fast paced society where people eat on the go and often do so alone, the meal in a hospitable home offers a remedy to weariness and loneliness.

To enhance the eating experience for our guests, we should endeavor to offer food and drink that is appealing to them. It's a good idea to inquire ahead of time as to tastes and distastes regarding food and to take account of any food allergies our guests might have. Regarding the sometimes touchy subject of alcohol, we should employ the 'stronger' brother/'weaker' brother theology of Paul in Romans 14, and defer to the preferences of our guests lest we cause them to stumble (14.20). This is especially true if our guest is a recovering alcoholic. Taking these thoughtful steps enhances the welcome our guests will feel, and contributes to them seeing the tangible application of Jesus' command to love your neighbor (see also Php 2.4).

Personal Attention:

As we learned from the Martha and Mary story, giving our full attention to our guests is a vitally important characteristic of a welcoming home. As hosts, we should take the time to talk with our guests, hear their stories, and share their dreams and disappointments. This is enormously challenging for many of us who believe that time is our scarcest resource. Make no mistake; giving personal attention to our guests requires disciplined commitment. Those of us who revel in our ability to multi-task need to understand that in doing this, we can give off the impression of

being distracted and giving only divided attention to our guests. Telling our guests, either explicitly or implicitly, that we have other things we need to be doing erodes hospitality. Giving our guests the impression that we are making a big sacrifice to be with them is unwelcoming. As hosts, we need to be careful and aware of the kinds of messages we might unknowingly be sending to our guests. In our day, part of what it means to be a welcoming home is to stand in contrast with the impersonal frenetic nature of the culture our guests have emerged from when they walk through our door. We too are part of that culture and have been impacted by it, and it takes disciplined awareness to slow down and be attentively present and available for our guests.

Safety:

Why do people often choose to be alone rather than in the company of other people in a hospitality setting? One reason is that they fear the setting will be unsafe (this is also a reason why people are reticent to extend hospitality to others). Ensuring physical safety is one concern for hosts, especially those who reside in economically depressed communities. It is here in particular where a solid understanding of boundaries is paramount. But safety, especially emotional safety, is a very big issue in suburban and affluent communities as well. As hosts, we must be vigilant in promoting an inclusive atmosphere so that no one feels like a fifth wheel. This is particularly true in group hospitality settings, where there is a mixture of people who are 'strangers' with each other.

This issue becomes even more crucial in cases where most of the guests know each other well, and there are only a couple of newcomers present who are trying to fit in. It is very easy for such newcomers to feel like outsiders, and this makes them feel unwelcome. Hosts must be very deliberate in giving newcomers ample ease of opportunity to be included in the activities of the group, and this especially includes conversation. Hosts, in a variety of well thought-out ways, need to invite (not force) newcomers to actively participate in the life of the group. This creates an environment of mutual sharing and respect, and makes newcomers feel welcome, safe, and more likely to return. One way that hosts can do this is to value the contributions of other guests and encourage them to share their gifts.

What Makes a Good Host?

Proper Priorities:

As hosts, we must constantly remind ourselves of the ultimate goal of hospitality – to bring people to a saving faith in Christ and make God's Kingdom of righteousness ever more real in our community and world. This is important because so often, other considerations can crowd out this priority, and when taken far enough, can restrain our hospitality and welcome.

One of the most obvious considerations of this kind is the issue of possessions. Most Christians are smart enough to say that their lives do not revolve around their possessions – they know that's the right thing to say. But even if that really is what we believe, it doesn't guarantee that we won't be overly clingy when it comes to the value we place on our possessions. And when it comes to hospitality, such attitudes must be worked through and prayerfully addressed. We have to come to terms with the reality that opening our home to 'strangers' means that things will be damaged, broken, and stolen. Such things are virtually inevitable sooner or later in a fallen world for those who make hospitality a way of life. It's part of the deal. Those who place an inordinate value on possessions will find extending hospitality to be extremely difficult, and such extensions will likely be too restrained and too gated.

I have found that a sustained commitment to hospitality in the home requires that I not be too attached to possessions. I'm not saying it's easy, but I do think it's often necessary in order to avoid a flagging commitment to welcoming strangers. How do I do it? One way is remembering that Jesus did not endure the crucifixion for clean carpets, sparkling place settings, or immaculate serving pieces – he did it for people. Likewise, hospitality is not about things, but people. Keeping the main thing the main thing is an essential characteristic of a consistently good host.

Proper Expectations and the Issue of Limits:

We are to imitate Christ (Jn 13.15, 1C 11.1), but that doesn't mean we *are* Christ. Unlike Christ, we exist with frailties, weaknesses, and limits on our abilities. What's more, we live in a world of limited resources. Our time is limited, our space is limited, our money is limited, the amount of food we can provide is limited, and our own energy is limited. Worse yet, the need for hospitality is virtually unlimited. When Jesus, while at the home of Simon the Leper, told the house that 'the poor you will always have with you' (Mt 26.11; Mk 14.7), he was amplifying the ever present need for extending hospitality in one form or another. The needs of the world never take a day off. When comparing the almost unlimited need for hospitality with our quite limited ability (at least on a global scale) to offer it, it doesn't take long for discouragement and hopelessness to set in. This leads to a loss of joy in hospitality and can lead to withdrawing hospitality altogether as a way of shielding ourselves from our own inadequacy to meet the need.

This is why proper expectations and a proper Kingdom perspective are basic to hospitality as a way of life. Hospitality forces us to live in the tension between the over-abundance of God's Kingdom and the reality of limits. Hosts need the courage to live close to their limits, continually striving through (and increasingly depending on) God's power to extend what is possible, while at the same time realizing the incompleteness of their efforts. It's not a sin to be finite. Knowing this helps ward off crippling discouragement. Moreover, we as hosts participate in the discipleship

aspect of hospitality, because by allowing God to extend our limits, we uniquely experience his power in our lives by virtue of relying more and more on Christ to intervene and provide. Hospitality is a faith walk because when vitally practiced, it puts us out on the frontier of uncharted territory.

We cannot meet every need, and our hospitality boundaries need to reflect this. But we can meet some needs, and our boundaries must not stifle what is possible under the guise of protecting us from the disappointment of the impossible. Our Spirit-guided efforts demonstrate to the world what is possible when people care and what God can do in our midst.

Suffering and the Poor:

Good hosts do not recoil from the poor and their suffering. Even though we cannot individually solve the pandemic of global poverty, we can nonetheless be present and share burdens with the poor in our communities. Good hosts do not use their limits as excuses to neglect the plight of the poor. If such excuses were valid, Jesus wouldn't have commanded his host in Lk 14 to invite the poor into his home.

The issue of suffering and the poor is not confined to the physical variety. There is a great spiritual poverty in our land as well, and hosts must engage this kind of poverty too. We cannot withdraw from people who have horrible stories to tell about the depths of their sin. To the contrary, this is exactly the kind of openness and vulnerability we should be welcoming as hosts, difficult though it may be. But again, it's very important to have proper expectations. We must not try to measure the quality of our hospitality in terms of quick or dramatic successes in the lives of our guests. We often must be content with small and less tangible signs of progress, trusting that God is at work in the seemingly minor victories.

Identity:

Good hosts know who they are, and why they're doing what they're doing. Hosts who are intentional in their Christianity understand the differences between Christian hospitality and cultural hospitality, and what's at stake. They recognize and challenge prevailing attitudes about power and prestige that marginalize and isolate people for unbiblical reasons. They challenge the devaluing of human life that comes from classifying people based on unbiblical notions of success and worth. And they challenge society's uber-paced obsession with radical individualism, and the loneliness, isolation, and mistrust it has created. Christian hosts proudly practice hospitality as a deliberate alternative to such things. Where the above societal trends all contain a strong degree of unwelcome, good hosts know they are cultivating a contrasting vision of welcome.

Good hosts also know their limitations, and take time to allow God to refresh them. Hospitality as a way of life is highly demanding, and it cannot be done long-term without finding time and space for personal renewal, similar to what Jesus did during his time on earth (Mt 14.13; Lk 5.16, etc). It is no accident that part of the reason why we have largely lost a robust theology of the Sabbath is because we have largely abandoned hospitality as a way of life. Recovering hospitality as a way of life requires recovering a serious observance of the Sabbath rest and the spiritual nourishment and refreshment it is designed for. Once again, we see how hospitality helps us, even as hosts, to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2.28).

Summary

Hospitality in the home is both highly challenging and highly rewarding. It takes great effort, and even greater reliance on God. As we've already seen, God delights in bestowing supernatural blessing through hospitality. By being welcoming hosts, we can invite the outside world into our world of Christianity lived out through hospitality. Through this, we can become a blessing to the nations. It is both scary and exciting to reflect on the potential for Kingdom impact through hospitality that God has given us. Will we embrace it, or will we shrink from it?

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

- 1) Think of someone in your life you find difficult to deal with for whatever reason. How does what we learned today inform your hospitality approach with them?
- 2) What is your lived attitude toward your possessions? How does it impact your hospitality posture?
- 3) How far out of your comfort zone does the idea of welcome in Christian hospitality take you? How quick are you to erect boundaries that domesticate the Christian idea of welcome and allow your limits to go unpushed?
- 4) Do you find what we learned today to be intimidating? Is this good or bad?

Appendix – Hospitality and Location

While this brief discussion might strike some as overly philosophical, my hope is that it might prove helpful in getting some perspective on how we might go about practicing hospitality absent a 'nice' home in a 'nice' neighborhood.

Christian hospitality presents us with a potential dilemma. If the goal of hospitality is to change people from strangers to valued guests, how is this done by Christians who are themselves 'strangers in the world' (1P 1.1, 1.17; 2P 2.11)? As we've seen, the Israelites were commanded to extend hospitality to 'aliens' in their midst, but we know from the Bible that they too were 'aliens' and strangers in the world (Gen 15.13; 1Ch 16.19; Ps 105.12; Zec 7.14; Acts 7.6; Heb 11.13). It seems a little 'strange' that we as 'strangers' of the world are commanded to extend hospitality to other 'strangers'.

It is very interesting that in the Bible, hospitality is often wrapped up in the issue of sojourner. There is an unmistakable emphasis in Scripture on the idea of people being on a pilgrimage. The idea of traveling on a pilgrimage is often physical in the Bible as we've seen. Abraham was a sojourner, the people were sojourners during the wilderness years, Jesus and his disciples were sojourners, as was Paul. But the Bible also gives us the sense of spiritual pilgrimage. It is interesting that in Gen 47.9, Jacob describes all the years of his life as a 'pilgrimage'. Paul routinely describes the Christian life as running a race – a continual journey from one place to another.

Why is this important? If hospitality depends on having a fixed location as the place where it occurs, then much of what we have studied in Scripture regarding hospitality wouldn't be there. When it comes to location, hospitality occurs within a larger rubric of pilgrimage. Since all Christians are on a pilgrimage as strangers in the world, the relationship between hospitality and location is often quite loose and fluid.

But in saying that fixed locations are not requirements for hospitality, let's hasten to make a distinction between location and a sense of place. It has often been remarked that American culture is exhibiting a kind of 'homelessness' that reflects a growing loss of place in our society. Put simply, people may have 'homes', but their lives are marked by profound 'homelessness'. People move regularly. Their jobs take them to the four corners of the globe and require ever longer hours at work. Technology is feeding a reality that is increasingly virtual rather than tactile. What's especially telling is that all of these trends toward a loss of place are increasingly not being forced upon an unwilling public, but are trends growing numbers of people are embracing because they prefer this cultural 'homelessness' over being at 'home'. It should be obvious, given these cultural trends, why we are less likely to know our neighbors. Our neighbors, and increasingly us as well, are losing a sense of place and orientation. This, I would suggest, is a fundamental challenge to hospitality that

transcends issues of location, because issues of place and orientation are issues of self. A lack of orientation and place can result in an empty self-image, and an empty self is unable to realize that he has something to give, or that he is in need of receiving something he lacks. Once this is gone, hospitality loses its function.

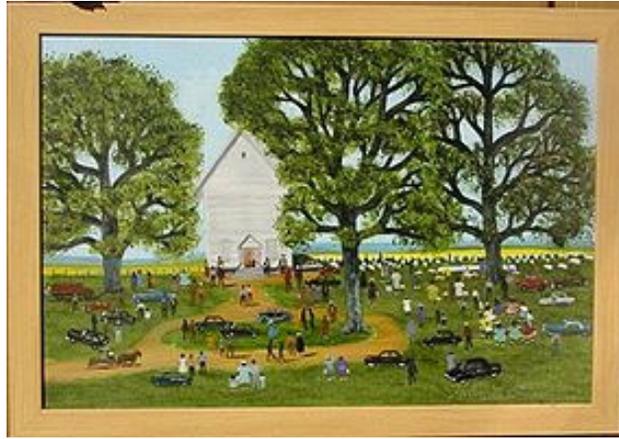
How are we to overcome this? How can we transcend issues of location while regaining a sense of place so that the sense of place offered to the world through our extension of hospitality can go forth? For me, it is imperative that I remember that the world is God's creation, and that God's Kingdom is my ultimate home. This is why hospitality can take place in a home (Lk 10), at a water well (Jn 4), in Joppa (Acts 9), in Galatia (Gal 4), in a town square (Gen 19), in the countryside (Ruth 2), and in the heavenly realms (Rev 19). One doesn't need a fixed location to extend hospitality. But one does need a sense of place to extend hospitality. And what is our sense of place, our 'home', as Christians? It is the Kingdom of God, made up of people from every nation and tribe. Paul is very clear about this in Eph 2.19-22. Ps. 84.4-5, while depicting the pilgrimage of the faithful to the temple, God's home, gives us a picture of our own pilgrimage as well. We are on a journey home, where we will be eternal guests in God's house. This is our sense of place, and it is from this foundation that we offer hospitality, regardless of our physical location.

When I offer hospitality in my physical house, the house doesn't provide my ultimate sense of place for offering hospitality. My physical house is not my permanent home. 'Ownership', in Christian hospitality, shouldn't be equated with the idea of ownership in a real estate sense. We may or may not 'own' (as the culture defines it) the location where we extend hospitality. But we must have ownership in our sense of place that allows hospitality to take place regardless of where we are.

It is a great paradox of the faith that we are at once called to be at home, while being on a pilgrimage. But this is how we bridge issues of location and place, and it is clearly the understanding that people in Scripture adopted as they practiced hospitality while on the move. They were able to do this the same way we can today; by realizing that it is God who is directing our pilgrimage so that we might find our ultimate home. This is how we can be strangers in the land and offer hospitality to other 'strangers' who lead lives of dizzying 'homelessness'. Unlike these 'strangers', we have an identity that grounds our sense of place and orientation. We are strangers in the world because we are no longer strangers with God. It's amazing that we who are called to follow the One who had no place to lay his head are also called to extend hospitality. We can do this because as guests of God, we lay our heads upon Christ our Host (Mt 11.28-29). The hospitality we have experienced through Christ is what we share with others and seek to bring our guests into through hospitality.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 6 – Hospitality in the Church



Church Picnic, by Helen LaFrance

This week, we transition from hospitality in the home to hospitality in the church. The two topics are not unrelated, of course. Even though Paul wrote many of his letters to churches, the line between home and church was often more blurry in his day than in ours (Rom 16.5; 1C 16.19; Col 4.15; Phm 1.2). But there are aspects of Christian hospitality that find their fullest expression in God's presence within the life of the church. So while we will see some broad overlap with what we've already covered in previous weeks, we will find much in this lesson that should expand our understanding of hospitality. My hope is that we as a church will come to see hospitality as basic to the life of the church, and even to proper worship of God.

Hospitality in the church is not simply about having church potlucks, picnics, or coffee and crumpet hours. It isn't just about having greeters at the door to welcome people. It isn't even just about setting a banquet table for the hungry, whether it be a tangible hot meal for the poor or contributing as a church body to an external food pantry. Hospitality absolutely includes all of these things, and none of them should be minimized. All, to some degree, are marks of a hospitable church. But hospitality in the church is much more than these things. There are some very big ideas that we will begin exploring today that under gird, support, and give theological definition to these outward acts of hospitality. What's more, it's my hope that what we cover today might spur us towards an even greater vision of hospitality in our church. The stakes are high and far-reaching. It is in this lesson that we will begin seeing just how much hospitality is not only about acts, but attitudes and beliefs as well.

The Church as God's House

Repeatedly in the OT, the tabernacle/temple is referred to as God's house (Ex 23.19, 34.26; 2S 7; 1K 8.43; 1Ch 6.48, 1Ch 9, 1Ch 22; Ez 2.68-10.9; Neh 10-13; Ps 42.4, 55.14, 135.2; Ecc 5.1; Is. 2.3; Jer 27.21; Ezk 10.19; Mic 4.2; Hag 1.14), where God dwells with his people (1K 8.27; 1Ch 23.25; 2Ch 6.18; Ps 68.16-18; Joel 3.17). The temple was both the geographic and spiritual centerpiece of OT worship precisely because it was seen as the house of God where God himself dwells. It is here that the people were invited to worship and praise God as well as offer a variety of sacrifices to address their sins and express their praise.

Leviticus 1-8 is one of the greatest examples of hospitable grace anywhere in the Bible. It is here that we see the grace of the sacrificial system, where people of all varieties (particularly both rich and poor) could approach the tabernacle and offer sacrifices to God. Nobody was excluded from God's house or the worship norms of the nation on the basis of economic or even ethnic barriers. It is why Jesus is so outraged by the conduct of the human gatekeepers of the temple, 'my house' (Mt 21.13; Mk 11.17; Lk 19.46; Jn 2.16 – here, Jesus refers to the temple as 'my Father's house'). Not only have these stewards turned God's house into a 'den of robbers' (importantly, see Jer 7.11 for context), they have done it in part by excluding faithful gentiles from the opportunity to properly worship God (Mk 11.17, quoting from Is. 56.7). The significance of this cannot be overstated. The rampant abuse, neglect, and perversion of the function of the temple by the very priests who were entrusted to its care precipitated the decline of the spiritual wellness of the people in general, and was an inciting factor in their exile from the land and the temple's destruction (Jer 7.11-15, 23.11-12; Ezk 8.16-17). To defile the house of God by making it a place of exclusion and unwelcome in areas where God has commanded the opposite is to commit an abomination.

Why is this relevant to us in our post-temple era? It is because the NT speaks of the *church as God's house*, with Christ as its head. Eph 2.19-22, 1Tm 3.15 and Heb 3.5-6 are explicit on this point. That means there's continuity between the OT and NT teachings regarding "God's house" that we must take very seriously (see especially the continuity of 'sacrifice' language in 1P 2.4-5). So, like God's house in the OT, God's house in the NT should have certain characteristics that touch on hospitality:

The Church should be a Place of Welcome

In OT days, travelers from all over came to the temple to offer sacrifices and worship God, and they were to be welcomed and not excluded. Today, we have both physical and spiritual pilgrims all around us whose lives and attitudes are out of sync with God. More than any other house, it is God's house that should be welcoming them and encouraging the faith and fidelity that results in forgiveness. If modern-day

pilgrims are not welcome in God's house, where do we think they'll go instead? It's a question that should haunt us. To be welcoming is a sign that a community is alive and isn't living afraid. An orientation of welcome is a formidable indicator that we have a great desire to share the treasure of truth and peace that have been given to us by Christ our Host. A church that does not welcome strangers for whatever reason (fear, insecurity, weariness, a desire for comfort and familiarity) is dying spiritually (and probably numerically as well).

The church should be a People of All Nations

God's Kingdom is comprised of a people from every nation (Ps. 22.27, 47.1, 102.15; Is 2.2, 56.7, 66.18-20; Jer 3.17; Zep 2.11; Mt. 28.19; Rom 16.26; Rev. 5.9, 7.9). We will discuss this more thoroughly in our lesson on hospitality and race. But at this point, it serves us well to begin thinking about how a house comprised of people from every nation ought to look, and the kinds of barriers, tensions and conflicts that can arise. I would suggest to you that this is often where a church's commitment to hospitality is most tested.

The church is a place where God is the Host

Similar to the temple, the church is where God dwells with his people as Host and invites us to commune with him as his guests through his grace. But also like the temple priests, we, as God's ambassadors (2C 5.20; Eph 6.20), have been entrusted with the role of host in order to welcome others (including inviting God himself to be powerfully present among us in worship), and to make the church a place for strangers and fellow sojourners. It should be self-evident that the same pitfalls and propensities for abuse and idolatry in God's own house that befell the priestly order in the OT should be heeded by us today (we are, after all, a 'royal priesthood' (1P 2.9)). What kind of idols have we allowed to take up residency in our church? Are we a welcoming place for strangers, or do we need to outgrow an ingrown mentality? These aren't just questions about church growth; they are questions that go straight to our role as stewards in God's house and what hospitality does and doesn't look like inside these walls. The OT is clear that this is a topic of considerable gravity.

Hospitality and Meals in the Church

The link between hospitality and meals has been greatly stressed in this course. The larger social and spiritual implications of shared meals have also been discussed at some length. We will reiterate these concerns in this section through looking at a few tangible expressions of hospitality and meals in the church.

The Agape Meal

In the early church, the agape meal (the love meal) was so vital to the life of the church that some early churches actually attached it to the practice of communion.

The agape meal was a real feast that served important social functions. Both the baptized and the unbaptized brought what they could, and they all ate together. This ensured that everyone received a good meal, and it promoted social equality between rich and poor, men and women, slave and free. This kind of deconstruction of the accepted and understood social orders of the day was radical and subversive. The result was outside scorn and persecution, but also tremendous growth, because the church had become a place of welcome for strangers and the disenfranchised.

The agape meal is not a 2,000 year-old relic. It is still practiced today in some congregations, often in the form of church-wide picnics, mission dinners, and other community celebrations. Many of my relatives now deceased told matter-of-fact stories about church-wide lunches that were abundant and sumptuous. Such meals were the highlight of the week, and were a normal and joyous aspect of the church's social and spiritual life. The meals were also a great outreach to folks outside the church. Outsiders were attracted not only to the prospect of a meal, but also to the inviting and friendly nature of the gathering. The meal often served as the entry way for outsiders to become comfortable with the church body and to eventually become a formal part of God's family.

Put simply, there is a reason why most church buildings have some things in common; a sanctuary to worship in, a nursery to care for children, and a kitchen to prepare and serve food. Even today, the architecture of most churches recognizes the valuable place of meals in the corporate life of the church.

The Lord's Supper

There are significant hospitality overtones embodied in the Lord's Supper.

1) Most obviously, the Lord's Supper is the LORD's supper. It is a meal that is given by Christ the Host to us as his guests. In the Lord's Supper, Christ, in an act of extraordinary hospitality, is hosting a meal in which he as the host invites us to his table to spiritually feed on him. By partaking in this meal, we are participating in God's hospitality to us. Because to partake in the Lord's Supper requires the proclamation that God is Lord of our lives and that we belong to him through his death (1C 11.26), partaking in God's meal makes us willing participants in God's redemptive work in us individually *and corporately*. God gathers us together, and feeds us together as the Body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is a manifestation of God's hospitality to us that is uniquely expressed in the life of the church.

2) The Lord's Supper is thoroughly subversive. In the early church, the concept of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of some religious leader was cause for persecution by Romans as well as Jews. The Lord's Supper was often cited as an obvious example of depraved cultish immorality, and became part of the repertoire of

reasons behind the Roman persecution of the church. Times have changed, but not as much as we might think. Today, the Lord's Supper directly attacks the notion of individual autonomy and adequacy that is a mainstay of our political and consumerist society. In the Lord's Supper, we are being asked to give up trying to earn our way into God's favor through our own individual efforts. To partake in the Lord's Supper is to find rest in the opposite – that it is through Christ's work that we have found favor with God. To participate in God's hospitality in this ongoing way through regular administrations of the Lord's Supper is to joyfully and tearfully acknowledge that we are his ever-needy guests in need of the grace and eternal life that we are entirely unable to manufacture on our own. I would suggest that there are precious few confessions that are more subversive in our culture than this.

3) The Lord's Supper raises very difficult questions about the intersection between hospitality, discipline and division. One might think that hospitality and discipline would be opposed to one another. But actually, hospitality depends on discipline. The Lord's Supper is a perfect example. It takes discipline to gather together as a body at God's table to partake in his meal. Protestants in particular are acutely guilty of lacking this kind of discipline, and as evangelicals, we need to seriously ponder what this lack of discipline has done to our own perspective on discipline and hospitality. It sounds crazy that God's people would neglect receiving the hospitality of their Savior through the Lord's Supper and consider it optional or even non-essential. It sounds crazy because it is crazy. To neglect the Lord's Supper is to reflect a lack of discipline that results in a lack of receiving hospitality, and probably results in a less-than-vigorous extension of hospitality to others.

Regarding divisions in the church, the Lord's Supper highlights what some have called the wound of hospitality in the church. It is worth pondering how the Lord's Supper remains a point of division among Christians. Perhaps more than any other liturgical act, the Lord's Supper is a place where disunity in the global church is most obvious. We can sing hymns together, listen to the preached Word together, and we can increasingly even acknowledge the legitimacy of each other's varied baptisms. But for Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox and Protestants, it is still not possible to commune together at the Lord's Table. Given Paul's repeated urgings to his audiences to be one in Christ (Rom 15.7; 1C 1.10; Gal 3.28; Eph 3.6; Phil 1.27; Col 3.16), it is hard not to conclude that our splintering is like a broken mirror that distorts the image of Christ (Lohfink). It is the Lord's Supper where church division meets church liturgy, and the world sees that our reception of God's hospitality is compromised through our division with each other. We are fools if we think this doesn't negatively impact the receptivity of the world to God's hospitality.

On the other hand, it is also true that division is sometimes necessary, and Paul's teachings on the Lord's Supper are explicit on this point. In 1C 11, Paul addresses the

abuse of the Lord's Supper at Corinth. The Lord's Supper had become an avenue for gluttony, inequity, and 'me-firstism' (v21), all of which contradict the hospitality of Christ, the Host of the meal. Paul accuses the Corinthians of despising the church and humiliating each other, and he could have rightly accused them of disrespecting Christ their Host. He warns his audience that partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is to invite judgment through sin. And he also talks about the regrettable necessity of divisions to show who has God's approval (v19). Let's be clear – necessary divisions are symptomatic of the fact that there are way too many divisions in general. Nonetheless, Paul provides a set of discipline criteria for properly partaking of God's hospitality through the meal.

Summary

In the church, we not only extend hospitality to others, we uniquely participate in God's hospitality to us. Perhaps more than anywhere else, it is in the church where we most need to be cognizant of how faithful our hospitality is to the hospitality of our Host. That many churches do not contemplate their worship and church life within this context tells us all we need to know about why so much of American culture views the church as a place of unwelcome. Keeping hospitality constantly in view increases our level of fidelity to Christ, and holds us accountable (see Phm 1.22) to each other in aiding the spiritual health of the church through God's grace.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

- 1) Imagine being a parent of many children and hospitably preparing a meal for them in your home. How would you feel as the host if your children were so busy fighting with themselves that they wouldn't eat at the same table together? How do you think God feels about this in his own house?
- 2) How does participating in God's hospitality to us through the Lord's Supper impact your outlook on your hospitality acts?
- 3) What have we lost as a church from the loss of agape meals and other regular church-wide meals? How significant are the losses?
- 4) How can we be a more welcoming church, and how high a priority should it be?

Appendix – Hospitality, How Did We Lose It?

It's very interesting to study the history of hospitality in the life of the church and in society overall. But a study of such things is not just a stimulating academic exercise. There are important lessons here that warrant consideration as we seek to assess why we are where we are, and how we should go from here.

As we've seen, there is no question that the practice of biblical hospitality was vital to the spread and credibility of the Christian message and movement. But as the church transitioned from persecuted sect to the dominant religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries, the shape of hospitality began to change.

Substantial public resources and accompanying responsibilities flowed to the church, and hospitality came to be viewed as a 'public service' (think 'governmental'). During this time, Christians established many hospitals and hospices to care for the poor and the sick, and many hostels were also established to house travelers. Gradually, these hospitals were sometimes differentiated according to the kinds of people they served. St. Basil praised the hospital as an institution of hospitality. But in hindsight, hostels and hospitals began a trend of relying on more anonymous and distant settings as the primary locales where hospitality was practiced.

The result was that the poor were increasingly served from a distance in large numbers rather than one-on-one. Further, personal hospitality of individuals was increasingly reserved for people of status. The writings of John Chrysostom reflect this increasing tension between personal and institutional hospitality. As institutions of hospitality became more differentiated (and less and less rooted in the church), some Christians labored to stress the oneness of the hospitality table. But because there was no longer a central institutional context (ie: the church) to biblically ground hospitality, the fragmentation and impersonal aspect of hospitality became more pronounced. It is an unfortunate irony that while hospices, hostels and hospitals were all vitally important to human care, they also made it harder to preserve the very distinctives of hospitality that were most valued. Hospitality was increasingly taking on characteristics of a warehoused industry rather than an intimate ministry.

In the Medieval era, we find that some bishops tried to reclaim hospitality as a major ministry of the church. But what often happened was that hospitality became a ministry of the bishops almost exclusively, with the expectation of the laity's practice of hospitality being far less. This disparity between bishop and laity contributed to a disparity in the kinds of guests who were offered hospitality. The Medieval period witnesses a gradual increase in the practice of offering hospitality to the powerful and prestigious in society. Hospitality became an elaborate deference to wealth and power and was seen as a way of securing favored status with those of rank. In cases

when all were welcomed, those of lower status were often received at a different table and fed coarser food. In the end, hospitality reinforced the status quo rather than challenging and transforming it. The moral dimension of hospitality was being lost.

To some degree, the Reformers reacted against this, particularly its opulent aspects. They emphasized a return to a more biblical form of hospitality that focused on care for the poor and needy travelers. But importantly, the Reformers did not challenge the prevailing view of hospitality being conducted primarily within the civic sphere rather than within the church. The result was that the Reformers saw hospitality as a 'sacred act' (Calvin), but they did not particularly allow any sacred space for it.

The consequences of this were far-reaching, and are things that we as contemporary Christians often lament. The civic and public dimensions of hospitality (hospitals, hotels, poverty relief, etc) became detached from their Christian roots due to increasing secularism in society. Without the church being the key site for hospitality, the concept of hospitality itself became less Christian and more secular, and the church itself became less welcoming of strangers because it had also lost a biblical notion of hospitality *in the church*. While people like Wesley labored hard to recover an ecclesiastical emphasis on caring for the poor and sick, even he didn't refer to such efforts as 'hospitality'. As a result, no link was recovered between caring for the stranger and 'hospitality'.

In our day, hospitality is often equated with 'entertaining', and the moral dimension of biblical hospitality remains mostly lost. In our culture, both our households and even our faith itself have tended to be more and more privatized, and this has made us averse to the risks of extending hospitality to strangers. It's easier to redefine what hospitality is than to redefine our response to biblical hospitality. We can get very set in the mentality that our home is something of a refuge from the world. This can make us skittish about allowing the world into what seems to be our safest sanctuary that is supposedly protecting us from the world. The culture's modern distortion of true hospitality enables this mentality.

As Christians, we must be on guard in evaluating the degree to which we ourselves have lost hospitality through distortion. History gives us a fairly clear path in charting how the biblical version of hospitality has morphed into a mostly secular version, and what the results have been. This doesn't mean scorning hospitals and hotels. It does mean asking whether it's right for Christians to hand the keys over to the 'hospitality industry' *carte blanche*, and then grumbling about the societal consequences. I think not; we're called to something better.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 7 – Hurdles to Hospitality



A Busy Hong Kong Street

This lesson is the result of two open discussions among the adult Sunday school group that is taking this course. The attendees have shared their thoughts, ideas, frustrations, and hopes during these class sessions. As an 'instructor', it is a great privilege for me to be facilitating this class with folks who are mentally and emotionally engaged in the topic and are willing to be vulnerable in sharing their experiences. I have personally benefited from their wisdom, and it's my hope that their contributions which have been encapsulated in this lesson will benefit a much larger range of people as well. I extend a heartfelt "Thank You" to my students in no particular order: Bruce and Lois Alexander, Craig and Jo Collins, Joyce Wallen, Rob and Shirley Mackey, Jon and Pam Jacobsen, David and Anne Luginbuhl, Rita Rice, Helen Foster, Joe and Sue Lingeitch, Len Deibert, and Dutch and Deb Miller. ~ *Jason Foster*

Up until this point in our study of hospitality, our treatment of hospitality hurdles has been mostly on the margins. It is obvious from our look at the biblical data as well as examining hospitality in the home and church that hurdles exist and are formidable. In this lesson, we will focus squarely on the hurdles we face in extending (and receiving) hospitality, and attempt to propose biblically informed responses.

Some of the hurdles we will deal with in this lesson are rather universal, in that to some degree, these hurdles transcend geography. Others are acute in our particular setting in Northern Virginia. In both cases, our faith can help us and is not silent.

Hurdle: Extreme Busyness and Weariness

American culture increasingly shuns routine respites. Two-income families are normal, and many of our jobs ask a great deal of us in terms of time and travel commitments. But it doesn't stop there. Parents often become slaves to their child's schedule. Parents are told that their children need to be socially engaged in activities in order to properly develop, and are confronted with a dizzying array of activity options to enroll their children in. When compounding factors like 'relationship maintenance', church commitments, health issues, caring for elderly parents, and

other hobbies and interests are factored in, our excessive busyness and accompanying weariness are formidable hurdles to hospitality.

Response: Busyness is a hurdle to hospitality, but it's also an opportunity for hospitality to be a vital ministry to ourselves and the world. The good thing about busyness is that it's something many people share and lament. It provides not only a common point of connection (even if it's negative), but also allows rejuvenating hospitality to truly stand out as a unique blessing. Hospitality used to be the norm; now it's the exception. This is unfortunate. But when hospitality is extended, those to whom it is extended gain a much greater appreciation for how wonderful it is because it stands in such sharp contrast with the frenetic busyness that is dragging them down. What's more, hospitality can be incorporated even on a small scale in almost every source of busyness in our lives. Giving coffee to a coworker, taking 5 minutes to converse with a fellow neighbor who's walking their dog, getting someone's coat after the racquetball match, or offering a cold drink to the postal worker on a hot day gives off a spirit of hospitality that is noticed and appreciated, and can lead to bigger things.

Hospitality helps tangibly communicate the truth of Ps 46.10 (Be still and know that I am God), as well as Mt 11.28-29 (finding rest in Christ and taking on an easier and less burdensome yoke). It's paradoxical that hospitality requires work and can make us busy, yet defeats busyness in us and our guests. How is this possible? As we've seen, it is because God shows up in hospitality, and he renews our strength and even our provisions. Hospitality doesn't defeat busyness if it's just about our efforts. If it's just about us, hospitality eventually becomes one more task on an already overloaded list. But with Christ, we find joy in hospitality, and often, we find the time to both extend and receive it. Hospitality actually helps us to manage our busyness and put it in perspective. It helps us from becoming isolated workaholics and encourages healthy boundaries that keep us from being overwhelmed by busyness. This helps us personally, and also helps set a well-rounded example to our children who are looking at our lives as part of defining normalcy for themselves.

Hurdle: It's Difficult to Find Common Connections

This obstacle is particularly acute in areas of the country that are more heterogeneous than homogeneous. Back in the day, people who lived in a factory town had the factory as a common connection. The same was true for agricultural regions. In many places, the local church was at the center of the life of the community, and facilitated commonality and shared experience and purpose. Those days are mostly over, particularly in our part of the world. Our reality is very different. We have become what some have called a 'hyphenated America' made up of many different and small communities that are difficult to bridge. Even language is no longer a common connection, and the inability to communicate clearly impacts issues of welcome.

Even among otherwise homogeneous communities, differences in life stages impede connection. Sociology circles have rightly observed that the blistering pace of technological advance is increasingly blurring traditional understandings of 'generation' and even rendering them moot. It has been suggested that this particular generation is the 'non-generation generation'.

Response: While it's tempting to think that different peoples coexisting together are a recent hurdle to hospitality, in fact, it's not new at all. One need only look at the John 4 account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Finding common connections between different people is a challenge, but it's not insurmountable as Jesus and the woman showed. In our day, we may be different from our neighbors, but we still all ask many of the same big questions about God, the purpose of life, suffering, and the future. The Bible is clear that every single person is made in the image of God, yet is also a sinner. Scripture is clear that God has sufficiently revealed himself to the entire world so that everyone is without excuse when it comes to rightly embracing their Maker (Rom 1). There are indeed commonalities, BIG commonalities, between us and our neighbors that go straight to the purpose of hospitality – changing people from strangers (to us and to God) to valued guests (of us and of God).

The issue is not a lack of commonality between people in our day. The issue is knowing where and how to look to find commonality. Hospitality might be easier when it's performed in a more homogeneous setting. But one could make a case that hospitality extended in heterogeneous settings is arguably more in tune with the Bible's vision of hospitality. As we saw from our examination of Acts, the spread of the early church was thoroughly heterogeneous in that it bridged the highly formidable barrier of Jew and Gentile. This challenge of common connection was every bit as great as any comparable challenge we might be facing. When looking for common connections, we should learn from the approach of Pascal, and focus on our common humanity as a doorway through which connections can be intensified.

Hurdle: Fear of Vulnerability and Rejection

In a world full of strangers, how can we not be at least a little scared and gun-shy in letting down our guard and being vulnerable in practicing hospitality? And in life experiences that are peppered with the pain of rejection, isn't it reasonable to fear we will be rejected when we offer hospitality to others, or that we will be excluded from other people's extension of hospitality? Aversion to risk is sometimes a good strategy in building a retirement fund. Why isn't it also a good strategy in hospitality?

Response: It is completely understandable to fear rejection, because the Bible guarantees that we will experience rejection (Mt 10.12; Mk 13.13; Lk 6.22, 21.17). The Bible never says that rejection is fun or pleasant. But it does say that the most

important One will never reject or forsake us (Rom 11.1-2; Heb 13.5). This is important because if God shows up in hospitality settings, and will not reject or forsake us, then even the rejection of man that we might experience is overcome by God's acceptance and love of us. When we are vulnerable with others, we do so with confidence that God knows our entire story and has accepted us rather than used his perfect knowledge of us as a weapon against us. Yes, we will sometimes be rejected, and yes, people will sometimes hurt us when we expose our lives to them through hospitality. But our reputation is intact, because our stories as Christians are stories of how God has moved in our lives, and his Name will not be sullied (Mal 1.6-14).

We should also understand that we live in a world filled with people who are desperately looking for acceptance. While this desire is often misdirected, it is a desire that strengthens our hand when it comes to extending hospitality. When it comes to extending hospitality, the chances are pretty good that the person desires the acceptance that welcome and invitation communicate. It doesn't mean people will always accept our invitation. When we hear 'no', it doesn't always mean rejection, and we should be hesitant to take it that way. Busyness often requires extensive calendar planning so that spontaneous hospitality is probably tougher in our day. But just as with busyness, rejection is now mainstream for many people. The acceptance that hospitality communicates gets people's attention on a very personal level. Choosing to let our light shine among men (Mt 5.16) rather than retreating into a shell is a powerful witness.

Hurdle: It's Difficult to Penetrate Surface-Level Cordiality

This is a big problem in both the church and larger culture. Widespread rudeness and hostility are still pretty isolated in our churches and culture, though it does exist. Ironically, it's easier for people to know where they stand in such cases. What's often more difficult is getting past the surface-level friendliness and cordiality and actually engaging people on a deeper and more meaningful level. In our hospitality settings, many of us have experienced cases where superficiality is the order of the day while substance is never allowed to develop. There's nothing wrong with being friendly and cordial to strangers – this is a good thing. But if this is the extent of our interaction with people, it becomes a problem. Cordiality can become a protective cover from trusting people too much, allowing people into our lives very much, or investing ourselves too much in the lives of others. If this is the level at which a church is operating, the church will struggle to become anything more than a group of friendly strangers, and our hospitality will not resemble biblical hospitality.

Response: It goes without saying that this kind of dynamic is completely foreign to what the NT presents to us. Many of Paul's letters to churches contain very personal and even heart-wrenching accounts, appeals and torments (see especially Romans,

1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon and the Pastoral Epistles). Of special note is Colossians, which is a somewhat personal letter written by Paul to a church (or churches) he had never visited (Col 2.1). Paul had no place for superficiality in his interactions with others, even those he didn't know personally. Repeatedly, Paul exposes his personal story as springboards for deepening fellowship and developing sound practical theology. Repeatedly, it is through hospitality that such things took place. Much of the last half of Acts details Paul's time in establishing churches he would later write to, as well as discipling the new believers.

This issue brings many different concerns together. A difficulty in penetrating the surface says something about the depth of our welcome. Is the church a place where we keep people at arm's length rather than hospitably inviting them into our lives and encouraging them to share their lives with us? Is this a value that is supported in Scripture (no), or is it a cultural value that has been imported into the church (probably)? Are we committed as a church to encouraging deep relationships, and does our philosophy of ministry reflect this? If we're trying to get people into smaller care groups that are tailored to specific kinds of issues and concerns in order to foster meaningful connection, are we unwittingly contributing to a balkanized congregation that cannot be biblically supported (1C 12.12ff)? These are all very difficult questions, and a number of them were issues that Paul himself dealt with in his letters. These problems are nothing new, and will likely outlive us all.

In many cases, the best we can do is what Paul did. We must remind ourselves that we deeply need each other (1C 12.12ff), and that our own spiritual health is influenced by the health of the congregation at large (Rom 12.1-2 – the NIV is less than ideal in its 'living sacrifices' translation because the Greek is singular here; the proper translation is offering our bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular). The context is thoroughly corporate, not individualistic.). When this becomes our philosophy of ministry, the church starts looking different and acting different. Suddenly, being together as a Body becomes necessary and essential, rather than optional and burdensome. Suddenly, the guy sitting next to us in the pew becomes someone we need to get to know. Gradually, we start knowing each other's names and making time for each other and relying on each other to help us cope with trouble. We start eating together, celebrating holidays together, going on vacations together, doing ministry together, and deepening our walk with Christ together. In doing this, we will actually start to live out James 1.27, Heb 10.25 and 3J 1.8.

Hurdle: Impersonal 'Virtuality' & the Explosion of Choices lead to Self-Isolation

Until very recently, choices were relatively limited. But the entrepreneurial individualism of American culture has led to a dizzying array of choices, niches and conveniences that one can indulge in. This is not automatically bad, but it does enable

people to become isolated in their own world. Today, it really is possible to be so isolated that our only 'meaningful' contact with humanity can be our interaction with the pizza delivery guy. Very few people are this isolated, but it's the direction our society is heading in. Instead of being out in the world, we can now shop online, do our banking online, talk with friends and relatives online, increasingly work from home, and have our entire picture of the world framed by what we see on 24 hour cable news.

Lest anyone think this is an exaggeration, it behooves us in this geographic area in particular to think of the trends that are afoot right in front of us. It used to be that families would eat together, pray together, and do activities together because limited space and limited choices forced us (mostly for the good) to get along with each other. Even with the advent of television, most households had one TV that the whole family watched together. Things have changed. Today, bigger and bigger houses home smaller and smaller families where there is at least one TV/computer and phone per person in the house. 'Virtuality' and choice are enabling us to isolate ourselves even from our own families in our own homes. In middle and upper class circles, the trend is toward isolation not togetherness, and this is reflected in our churches. Some megachurches have gone as far as simply accepting this as reality and are prepared to tolerate the anonymity it often brings and even encourage it through niche worship styles that don't require us to 'bear with one another in love' (Eph 4.2).

Response: As we've discussed in previous lessons, Christian hospitality directly attacks this cultural trend, particularly when it starts becoming an ecclesiastical trend. Many of us are aware of the dangers of trying to live the Christian life in isolation. Hospitality is a critical component in keeping us together and affirming our humanity. And it helps develop our identity in the family of God.

We need to seriously guard against the self-isolating trends in our culture. During the course, we have stressed the need for boundaries in hospitality, and nothing that's being said here changes that. But the trend toward isolation is often very subtle, and we need to continually examine where we are on the spectrum of open vs isolated. We need to do this because the culture we live in is not neutral on this question; it is tugging us all in the direction of isolation. This requires us to be vigilant in assessing ourselves and bouncing our orientation on this issue with what Scripture teaches. This isn't a question we ask and answer once, but is something we should be regularly interacting with. King Saul didn't turn into a bad guy immediately and overnight. It was through a series of much smaller indiscretions and poor judgments that he turned into what he became. This is often the way it is with us as well.

Hurdle: The Transitory Nature of our Area makes Hospitality Very Difficult

While recent studies suggest that our geographic area is not as transitory as many of us think, there remains little doubt that people come and go with high frequency in this area. The prominence of government, the military, international embassy personnel, and top-rated educational institutions draw a lot of people to this area, with many staying here only temporarily. This impacts hospitality in a variety of ways. People who don't feel a strong attachment to the area may feel less inclined to become immersed in the community, and hospitality suffers. People who know they're only going to be here a relatively short time may adopt a broader stance of isolation rather than engagement. More permanent residents may choose not to reach out to transitory neighbors because they reason that such people aren't worth their time since they'll be leaving soon anyway. All of this contributes to not knowing our neighbors, which obviously impedes our ability to live out the great commandment through hospitality.

Response: This issue ties directly to the hospitality sojourner motif in Scripture that we've been discussing throughout the course. We are called to be at home, while being on a pilgrimage. Hospitality does not require a fixed or permanent location. The transitory nature of our area does not provide cover for either temporary or more permanent residents to write each other off either explicitly or implicitly. Scripture provides no warrant for such a posture, and in fact, assumes pilgrimage as normative while also commanding hospitality.

As much as it's up to us, we must practice a Christian approach to engagement with our neighbors. That means extending hospitality without regard to someone's residency status in our community. We can't force people to accept our invitations, but we should not be grudging in our invitations. We need to understand that we have been enormously blessed by being placed in this particular area at this time. People from all over the world come to our area to work, study, intern, and vacation. While we need to go out into the world with the Gospel, we must also realize that in many ways, the world has come to us. What an extraordinary opportunity! It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see that hospitality in our area can quite literally change the world. Part of why we are not as hospitable as we should be is because our vision of hospitality is too small. By extending hospitality in this transitory environment, we are afforded the opportunity to learn from many different kinds of people, and have them learn from us and take what they learn with them wherever they go. And I have found that while there are exceptions, many transitory folks, particularly internationals, relish the opportunity to spend time in an American home and learn about us, our culture, and our God.

Summary

When I was at seminary, I took a required course on evangelism where I befriended a college student from Korea who was over here in America studying. During one of our lunches, he said something to me I've never forgotten. There was a relatively large community of international students at the college he was attending, and periodically, many of these students would get together and compare notes on their experience in America. Virtually all of them had one common regret. They bemoaned the fact that they had spent years in America studying at college, and yet during that time, almost none of them had been invited into an American home to fellowship with an American family. They truly felt like strangers in a strange land, and their perception was that Americans were superficially nice but mostly unwelcoming.

Many lifelong Americans can probably resonate with this sentiment too, including many churchgoers. Much of the American church needs a 'DNA change' on the issue of welcome and hospitality. Instead of saying to ourselves in church, "How quickly can we get out of here," we should be saying, "How can these folks help me in my growth with Christ, and how can I help them?" Instead of pondering, "Will I let them into my life," we should resolve to answer, "HOW will I let them in?" The church is a reflection of its people. A less than robust spirit of hospitality in our midst says something about all of us. Part of living the Christian life well is asking the right questions, and our chances of this improve when we are operating with the right orientation. None of the hurdles mentioned in this lesson are insurmountable, but they will be if we lack the courage and humility to address tough issues in our midst and don't strive for solutions that have real integrity.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 8 – Hospitality and Race



The 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery

"More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people...Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will." Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail", 4/16/63, addressed to 'moderate' Caucasian clergy who opposed King's non-violent demonstrations in Alabama

This lesson is a difficult and painful one. In the United States, even today, the intersection of hospitality and race is often tense. Deep-seated hurts, resentments, grudges, and distrusts on matters of race are still a reality in our society. We don't have daily or weekly civil rights marches anymore, but the American church too often continues to be a place of voluntary and willing segregation. In this lesson, my goal is to carefully explore why the American church largely remains racially divided, and why it matters within a hospitality context.

Let me be clear. This is not a lesson designed to make us all feel terrible about ourselves, or to elicit disgust with the church. Our goal is to better understand why things are the way they are, so that we will be responsibly equipped to act as appropriate going forward. This will mean addressing some unfortunate aspects of our history as American Presbyterians, and also to ask what could be uncomfortable questions that might hit close to home. We're not doing this to go on a guilt trip or to turn this into a political activism discussion (after all, we're not Unitarians), but hopefully to gain some insight on issues of welcome and race.

Why is this Topic Important?

As we've already seen in previous lessons, the Bible's vision of God's people is, among other things, racially diverse. Many Christians have long struggled to reconcile the Bible's vision of a people drawn from every nation and tribe with the reality that most of our churches just don't look that way. Even worse, the history of the church is sometimes littered with eras where an absolute commitment to racial segregation in the church was enforced as a basic article of faith. Those scars remain, and developing a theology of racial reconciliation in the church continues to be elusive. I will argue that part of why it is elusive is because the hospitality component of reconciliation has not been part of the answer as much as it should be.

This topic is important for another major reason. An individual church body that is not racially diverse has difficulty to some degree in relating the Christian faith to a global perspective. It only makes sense that if we surround ourselves with people who have similar characteristics and life experiences, a tunnel vision mentality can result if we are not intentional about broadening our contact beyond where it currently is. Folks who have been on mission trips understand this, and its part of why missions are so important to the church – mission trips aren't just about sharing the Gospel with different people groups; they also help us develop a world perspective that deepens our faith and increases our fidelity to the God of the nations.

American Presbyterianism and Race

There's no point in sugarcoating this topic. American Presbyterianism's historical record on matters of race is not great. While there are some bright spots mixed in, we need to understand as Presbyterians that there are reasons why Presbyterian churches have, for the most part, not been racially diverse. We must understand our own history to begin to understand why the problem of racial diversity in our circles is more acute than in other parts of the church. Some items to consider:

- 1) It is well documented that unlike Methodists and Baptists of the time, Presbyterians did not strongly challenge the institution of slavery in antebellum America. The fallout from this continues to the present day. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination did not issue an official apology and statement of repentance for its indifference and even toleration of slavery and racism until **2002**.
- 2) One consequence of this was that Presbyterians were acutely resistant to incorporating diverse worship styles into their churches. African American culture did not influence the way Presbyterians conducted worship.
- 3) A logical consequence of this was that Presbyterians, unlike other branches of the church, made little effort to cultivate and train African American clergy to minister in

their churches. James Lyon was a Presbyterian voice in the wilderness who believed the Civil War was God's judgment on the South for its stand on slavery. But his voice went unheeded, as most Presbyterian churches did not want to cede power and equality to African Americans, or challenge ingrained attitudes of racial inferiority.

4) The result was that the number of African American Presbyterians became extremely minimal. African Americans who remained in the Presbyterian Church were not permitted to be members of the church, much less eligible to be clergy, and were forced to sit in separate sections of the church building.

5) After the Civil War, resolutions to recognize equality among the races failed in the Synods and General Assembly (see especially Dabney's opposition in 1867). Instead of encouraging diversity in Presbyterian churches, the idea of separate and unequal became unofficial policy. The Stillman Institute was created to train African American clergy to lead a separate African American Presbyterian denomination. In 1898, the Snedecor Presbyterian Church became the black Presbyterian denomination in America. That virtually nobody has ever heard of this denomination tells you something about the Presbyterian commitment to diversity in those days.

The bottom line is that there are reasons why African Americans are more prominent in the pews of Baptist and Methodist churches today, and why African Americans who study divinity often attend non-Presbyterian seminaries. This severely inhibits the ability of the Presbyterian Church to become more diverse in its leadership and to broaden its pastoral sensitivities. It has also hindered the widespread training of African American theologians who subscribe to Reformed Theology. As Presbyterians, we must realize that in many ways, our branch of the church has the most to answer for and the most to overcome when it comes to matters of race.

We Can Have our Doors Wide Open, and Still be Inhospitable

Thankfully, today the overwhelming majority of Presbyterians are not opposed to racial diversity in the pews. At our best, we actively welcome and celebrate diversity and are intentional about cultivating it. But why is it so difficult to achieve racial diversity even when our top-level orientation is desirous of racial reconciliation and harmony in our midst? African American theologians who have circulated in Caucasian evangelical circles have made a number of on-point observations that are worth our attention:

1) 'Caucasian Christianity' is not altogether a universal expression of what good and normal Christianity looks like. Our Christianity is culturally conditioned to some degree, and represents only a slice of the pie. This wouldn't be so big a problem if we really believed and understood this. The problem is that too often, our inflexibility in the way we do church indicates something different.

2) Because our clergy is not diverse, it is not as effective in speaking prophetically to the issues that African Americans resonate with. Issues of justice and equal opportunity, as well as mercy to the poor are not stressed in our pulpits the way they are in African American pulpits. When we talk about evil, we are more apt to think of 9/11 than racial prejudice and bigotry. On the Sunday before MLK Jr Day, few of our sermons ever mention his name or draw inspiration from his words and actions. This oversight is unheard of in African American churches.

3) The African American religious experience is incredibly strong regarding the power of worship and song to literally change the world. There is a rich encyclopedia of hymns and spirituals that African Americans have found comfort in, and such hymns have proven to be pivotal in motivating Kingdom action in the face of sometimes deadly opposition. Do Caucasian evangelicals really possess this kind of theology of song? If we don't, it indicates that we are not learning something very valuable from our African American brethren.

4) Many Caucasian evangelicals are greatly unfamiliar with the African American experience in America, and that makes finding common ground and connection very difficult. Injustice, prejudice, poverty, and hardship are 'givens' in the African American community – they are simply understood realities in both the past and present. For many suburban evangelicals, this is not really their experience, and while this is good, it does make us susceptible to having a tin ear on these kinds of issues.

As an aside, for those who think that racial issues in the church are mostly a thing of the past, I would encourage you to read Ed Gilbreath's recent book, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity*.

Other Hurdles to Diversity

Even if racism no longer existed, and even if every Christian was 100% committed to racial diversity, there would still be formidable hurdles getting in the way.

1) We all operate with preferences. In church, preferences influence worship style, preaching style/delivery, preaching content, ministry focus, and church vision. There's nothing wrong with this, but it can be a hurdle to overcome.

2) Our surrounding neighborhood heavily influences (rightly) our methods of outreach and teaching emphases. While there are problems that are common to most neighborhoods (breakdown of the family, depression, drug abuse, domestic violence, and increasingly gang violence), these problems dominate the neighborhood dynamic in some places more than others. Churches rightly need to focus their ministries on the things that concern their people and keep their neighborhood up at night worrying about, and this will vary in intensity from place to place.

Hospitality is Part of the Answer

In saying that hospitality has a part to play in achieving a better state of racial diversity and sensitivity, I'm not saying that hospitality will overcome all hurdles in totality. Only Christ's return can do that. As we've said in previous lessons, when we discuss the role that hospitality can play, we must be careful to thread the needle between the possible and the impossible. Nonetheless, hospitality has unfortunately often been neglected as a component in addressing this perennially thorny topic.

1) According to Paul, Jesus himself has commissioned us with the ministry of reconciliation (2C 5.18ff). We have seen in previous lessons that hospitality settings in the Bible were often the place where just such a thing occurred, and this continues today. As we've seen, Christian hospitality affirms human dignity, human equality, and human dependence on God in equal measure. In other words, it provides a setting in which commonalities between different peoples become 'givens' that can provide a starting point for greater commonality to develop.

2) Christian hospitality also entails the notion of flexibility. Different guests have different needs, and we intrinsically understand that effective hospitality will be sensitive to this reality. This is absolutely crucial in bridging differences between races. If we have a deficient understanding of equality and human worth, it will show up in our outward expression of hospitality (and vice versa). Flexibility and inflexibility are key indicators of where we really stand on these issues.

3) Christian hospitality forces us to listen to God and to one another respectfully. In matters of race, respect and sensitivity are qualities we can't have enough of. It is through hospitality that we can better understand the perspectives of others and the worldview paradigms they're operating with. Hospitality provides a relaxing setting where bridges can be built, understanding can increase, and relationships can prosper.

4) We have mentioned that Christian hospitality is an intentional practice that requires commitment, patience, realistic expectations, and perseverance. Not coincidentally, the same elements are required to achieve real racial reconciliation. A commitment to Christian hospitality develops some of the most effective characteristics that are needed to bridge racial gaps long-term.

5) Churches need to be more hospitable when it comes to race. A church can be committed to racial reconciliation even if the actual congregation is not extensively diverse racially. Basic issues of logistics and population concentrations can make it very difficult for a church to build a multi-racial congregation. One alternative is to seek out partnerships with other congregations that have predominately non-Caucasian members. Increasing numbers of suburban and urban churches are actively seeking partnerships with each other to increase the effectiveness of ministry and to be a witness to how Christ's rule can motivate us to work together in love and respect. Hospitality forces all of us, including churches, to move beyond issues of turf for the sake of the Kingdom.

6) One reason why #5 is so important is because most of our clergy (and laity) simply don't know how to do ministry in urban non-Caucasian settings. It's not that we don't want to, it's that we don't know how. Hospitality forges the kind of cross-racial relationships that better equip us to make mentoring ministry relationships that yield fruit and expand our ministry vision and competence. It also fosters the ministry of presence, which when sustained, speaks to people and opens up doors.

Summary

Every Christian has certain blind spots, including us. It is often the case that we don't realize that we are being inhospitable to folks who are different than us. It's all very unintentional. But that doesn't mean it isn't real, or that it doesn't need to be reckoned with in our homes and church. To be a welcoming church is to have a deep and rich understanding of welcome. It goes beyond shaking someone's hand or offering them a drink. It means immediately realizing that our church is made better when we allow the backgrounds of other faithful believers to help shape everything we're about as a church. By being exposed to broader perspectives, we allow ourselves to be discipled.

From preaching and teaching, to worship, to ministry emphasis, to Kingdom vision, racial diversity molds us into what the NT church looks like. The barriers and hurdles are considerable, and nobody should believe that reconciliation through hospitality is easy. We cannot own someone else's life experience, but we can better understand and relate to it. Hospitality lays essential groundwork that is particularly relevant to the topic of race. Christian hospitality in the home and church communicates:

"You and I are equally dependent on God."

"You and I are both made in the image of God."

"You and I have the same dignity."

"You and I can learn from each other."

"You and I need each other."

"You and I are safe with one another."

"You and I can be good to each other."

"You and I can enjoy each other."

"You and I should listen to each other."

"You and I should be reconciled to one another."

"If you and I are Christians, we are part of the same family, and are kin."

The applicability of hospitality to racial reconciliation in the church is self-evident. We ignore it to the detriment of the Kingdom.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

- 1) Who was Tom Skinner? If you don't know, take an hour and find out. It will be worth your time and will reveal how in touch we are with the African American experience.
- 2) Imagine you are a person who's really struggling with how to relate your Christian faith to daily issues of parenting. Then imagine you visit a church for a few weeks that only talks about applying the Christian faith in the marketplace and jobsite. Would you feel that this church was touching on the issues that mattered to you, and would you continue to attend? What does this have to do with race and welcome?
- 3) When you sing songs in church, are you primarily looking to feel good spiritually, or are you also instilled with a strong passion to see the Kingdom come to earth as it is in heaven?
- 4) How can hospitality foster racial reconciliation in your sphere of influence?
- 5) How can the doctrinal emphases of Reformed Theology help us in developing a robust theology of racial reconciliation?
- 6) When you think of 'injustice', what comes to mind? How do you think your answer would compare with the answer an African American might give?
- 7) The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association recently held a major missions conference where the invitees proportionately represented the makeup of the global church. What became clear from the makeup of the audience at this conference is that the global Body of Christ today is mostly poor, non-Caucasian and increasingly charismatic. In other words, the average Presbyterian believer in America is a small minority in the global church today, and percentage-wise, we are shrinking by the day. How should this reality inform our perspective on hospitality, race and equality in the church?
- 8) Do you think the way in which the American church has often segregated itself along racial lines has impacted the effectiveness of its Kingdom work? Has the impact been positive, negative, or something in between?

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 9 – Hospitality and the Immigrant Community



‘Christmas in Immokalee’, 2007

It may sound ominous, but in some ways, our discussion of hospitality and race last week was a primer for what we will discuss this week. The intersection of hospitality and the immigrant community, particularly the Latino immigrant community, is arguably an even greater challenge facing the church and the nation in our day. Here in Northern Virginia, the influx of Latino immigrants has been significant. Our extended neighborhood is not the same place it was even 10 years ago. This statement is not intended to be seen as good or bad, but merely to accurately describe current demographic trends. The changing demographic landscape of many communities in America has created a severe crisis in the church that is well documented. Many urban and even suburban churches have failed to adjust to changing demographics and have either closed their doors entirely, or are holding nearly empty services to a dwindling number of congregants who are slowly dying off. It is not a pretty picture.

It is admittedly hard to discuss the immigrant community without touching on matters of government immigration policy. But in this lesson, we will attempt to reverse the pattern of having our Christian approach to immigration framed by political talking points. Instead, we will focus on developing a biblically informed stance toward the immigrant community that will principally inform our attitudes as Christians and the church, and only secondarily as political advocates. As in previous lessons, I neither expect nor demand universal agreement with what will be presented today. The issue of immigration is a touchy one in our day, with people across the spectrum holding very strong views. What we are attempting in this lesson is a sober and level-headed assessment that will politely challenge the extremes on both sides.

Returning to the Biblical ‘Alien’ Motif

From lesson 2, we learned that the Bible forges a middle ground between unfettered welcome and unfettered rejection of ‘aliens’. Our openness should not be so completely open that we allow everything (including a lot of bad things) in. But neither should our boundaries be so stringent that we adopt a default stance of exclusion. Both our openness and our boundaries need to be biblically informed in shaping our attitudes toward the immigrant community. As we pointed out earlier, many of us probably have tendencies either toward openness or boundaries. We should not operate as if such predisposed postures are completely correct and beyond challenge. Such predispositions need to be tested against the biblical principles we’ve learned in this course.

What’s more, as we’ve seen throughout the course, we ourselves as Christians were once ‘aliens’ and ‘strangers’ separated from God (Eph 2.12-19). Part of why we are ‘strangers in the world’ today is because we no longer belong to the world, but to Christ. We did not earn our way into this new status, nor did we initiate it. It is through the hospitable welcome of Christ that we were set on a path toward becoming his and being adopted into the family of God as his valued eternal guests. The basic confession of the Christian is that we are **all** lawbreakers, ‘illegals’, in need of the compassionate salvation of God that is supplied only through Christ. While we must be careful in how we apply this truth to the grits of daily living, it is a confession that does not provide much comfort to the idea of exclusion and marginalization as our default setting in dealing with immigrants. Where would we be if this was Christ’s posture toward us? What this teaches us is that humility is the order of the day on this issue, not moral superiority. Remembering this basic hook of the Christian story gives us a basis to identify with the immigrant community on some level, and foster more meaningful and productive (hospitable) interactions with them.

We must remember that many immigrants, both legal and illegal, come to America to escape crippling poverty, government corruption and abuse, abysmal living conditions and uncontrolled crime. This doesn't justify or legitimize illegal immigration. But we have to realize that many of them join us in looking for a better and greater city (Heb 11.10). As we've discussed, one key to effective hospitality is finding common connections with strangers and neighbors. Such connections are there to be mined, even with illegal immigrants.

The Issue of Citizenship

Paul’s theology of citizenship is critical in informing our attitude toward immigrants, especially when we don’t really know if an immigrant is ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’.

Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 16.37-38, 22.25-29), and such citizenship created opportunity and access in the Roman world (see especially Paul's appeal to Caesar in Acts 25.11), not to mention considerable legal protections. Yet, more than any other NT writer, it is Paul who talks about a more important kind of citizenship. Paul tells us that as Christians, we are citizens of God's house (Eph 2.19) and that our citizenship is in heaven (Php 3.20).

We are like Paul, in that while we are American citizens, our greater citizenship is in heaven. This greater citizenship defines our ultimate identity more than earthly citizenships and memberships. It is what we should care more about. As Christians and as the church, we should primarily be about increasing and strengthening the citizenship of heaven. This mission, as we've seen, transcends issues of race, gender and economic condition. It also transcends issues of earthly citizenship. It can be argued that the offer of national citizenship should be restricted for a variety of reasons. A similar argument cannot be made for the offer of heavenly citizenship. But if the church is perceived as a place of unwelcome to immigrants, our offer of heavenly citizenship to immigrant newcomers will be restricted not only numerically, but in its efficacy. How can we expect immigrants to think of heavenly citizenship as the ultimate source of value if the church seems more outwardly concerned with issues of national citizenship in its interaction with them?

As Christians, we have to ask the tough question of whether our political advocacy on issues of national citizenship is compromising our religious advocacy of heavenly citizenship. There shouldn't be any debate about which is more important. But unfortunately, there is real debate about whether our priorities are properly aligned.

The Great Tension Regarding Illegal Immigrants

We've seen that biblical hospitality entails both openness and boundaries, or as Volf puts it, exclusion and embrace. This dynamic is very clear when approaching the illegal immigration issue. In Scripture, we are confronted with competing emphases that bear on our interaction with illegal immigrants.

On one hand, we've seen that God identifies himself with the 'stranger' and the outcast in Mt. 25, and the fidelity of his people is measured by their compassion towards the stranger. The Good Samaritan parable of Lk 10 is shocking in its broad application of 'neighbor'. Jesus deliberately tells this parable to refute the attempt of the 'expert in the law' to limit the extension of 'neighbor' to exclude outsiders in order to justify himself. The ramifications of these parables cannot be flattened or domesticated without joining the ranks of those that Jesus was warning with these teachings.

On the other hand, we must also reckon with Paul's theology of the state in Rom 13. Because God has established the governing authorities, Christians are called to submit to those authorities as part of living in harmony and in peace with everyone (Rom 12.16-18). But of particular note is 13.2, where Paul warns of judgment for those who defy this authority. By definition, those who are in this country illegally are rebelling against the governing authorities, and Christians should not take this fact lightly when pondering their personal stance toward illegal immigrants.

So we are left with two biblical polarities that are very difficult to reconcile – the demand to love our neighbor and hospitably welcome the stranger, yet uphold the laws of the governing authority that has been established by God for the general welfare. Any solution is likely to be an uneasy one, but I would suggest that biblical hospitality can guide us along the path.

Welcoming but Conforming

As we learned from the OT, the Israelites were to welcome 'aliens' who wished to conform to the worship norms of the community, and to treat them well. In doing so, the attitudes and practices of both host and guest would better conform to the Law of God. These 'aliens' were not to be treated as second-class citizens or abused, but too often, they were. This abuse was a factor in the eventual exile of the nation from the Land. This framework can guide us today.

The church is to be a place of welcome, and any fencing of this welcome must be very selective and not capricious. Our church should be known as a place of welcome for all those who seek God. This will not be the case if we allow other loyalties to trump our loyalty to the heavenly nation we are citizens of. Immigrants, even illegal immigrants, should be welcomed in our midst.

But along with welcoming, we as the church should be about conforming. Contrary to popular opinion, God is not about accepting people just as they are. The church is not the Rotary Club. Instead, God is about conforming us to the likeness of Christ (1C 15.49; 2C 3.18). Stanley Hauerwas at Duke is quite helpful on this:

The unity of which Paul speaks, that between Jews and Greeks, is made possible through the common confession that Jesus is Lord, who has saved us by being raised from the dead. That unity is not based on the acceptance of everyone as they are because we want to be inclusive, but rather comes from the fire of Christ's cross, through which we are transformed by being given distinctive service in God's kingdom. *In Good Company: The Church as Polis*, 40.

The Christian community is defined by the confession that Christ is Lord, and is refined by the fire of Christ's Cross. This is not a picture of everyone being accepted just as they are and celebrating their unchanged status. To the contrary, the same Paul

who said 'there is no one who is good, not one' (Rom 3) later says that the community is defined by 'transformation through renewal' (Rom 12). Paul is not proposing a glorious acceptance of each other through common and unaddressed sin, but through common conformance to Christ that attacks sin head-on.

Christians and the church at large must welcome the stranger and treat him well. But we should also encourage the kind of repentance and course change that we should be practicing in areas of sin in our life. It's not okay to be unrepentant about known sin. Defying the God-established governing authorities is sinful if those authorities are not blatantly defying God. Extending compassion, mercy, and welcome to an illegal immigrant does not negate the need to faithfully uphold justice where the law is being broken. We must do both. It's a legitimate tension that must be weighed carefully. What we cannot do is scuttle one in favor of the other as others have done/are doing:

The 'Sanctuary Movement' – this is a movement among some churches to house illegal immigrants and protect them from imminent deportation. The idea is that an individual can seek asylum/sanctuary in the church building without seeking to address their immigration status. There is no real attempt to uphold Rom 13, and an argument can be made that these churches are actively undermining Rom 13.

Derrida – I have written extensively on this elsewhere (see my 'Hospitality: The Apostle John, Jacques Derrida and Us.' *Reformed Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 34, August 2007). Derrida believes the issue of immigration is fundamentally a hospitality question. He advocates a level of openness that equally welcomes 'good people or the devil'. In Derrida's paradigm, the welcoming of the serpent by Eve in Gen. 3 should be applauded, while the destruction of the serpent by God in Rev. 20 must be condemned. Anyone who wants to understand the pro-amnesty position in the immigration debate should read Derrida with great discernment.

The 2006 House Immigration Reform Proposal – this measure would have made it a crime for anyone, including churches, to knowingly provide aid to illegal immigrants. It's hard to see how this approach could be reconciled to the Mt 25 & Lk 10 passages discussed here, not to mention many other passages we've examined in this course.

Summary

Extending hospitality to the immigrant community in today's charged climate is very difficult. It often involves overcoming issues of language (see Appendix) and great distrust and fear on both sides. A palpable tension has developed between the immigrant community and 'conservative Christians' that is largely destructive to both and impedes the advance of the Kingdom. As Christians, we need to possess the spiritual maturity and humility to ask whether our current attitudes take the whole

counsel of God into account. It is damaging to view illegal immigrants as the enemy, because the feeling will be mutual. But even those who want to take this posture must contend with the straightforward teaching of Rom 12.20 which says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." In this one verse, we see hospitality and conformance working together.

In this lesson, we have only begun the process of formulating a Christian theology of engagement with the immigrant community. Considerably more work needs to be done by evangelical theologians, biblical scholars, and ethicists. But it is hoped that this lesson has at least equipped us with a solid starting point upon which to thoughtfully go forward.

Questions for Prayerful Reflection and Action:

- 1) When you see an immigrant day-laborer on a street corner, what are your immediate thoughts?
- 2) Would an illegal immigrant feel welcomed in our church, even if nobody in the church knew he was illegal?
- 3) Are you more disposed to welcome or shun immigrants? How has the biblical data challenged your disposition?
- 4) If someone paraphrased Lk 10.29 and asked you, "Is the illegal immigrant your neighbor", how would you respond?
- 5) Do we tend to see immigrants more through the lenses of heavenly citizenship or national citizenship?

Appendix – Hospitality and Language

A unique challenge of hospitality toward the immigrant community concerns the issue of language. Although English is not the official language of the United States, it is the historic language of the nation and is unquestionably the language that offers the greatest possibility of upward societal mobility and success. The phenomenon of immigrants coming to the United States who don't speak the English language is nothing new. What is new, according to some, is that unlike immigrants of yesterday, many of today's immigrants have little interest in learning the English language as part of their assimilation into mainstream American life. This assertion is debatable, and while the truth or falsity of this suggestion does have practical impact on how to extend hospitality in such cases, it shouldn't impact our orientation of engagement.

Biblically speaking, the dilemma of language starts in Genesis 11. It is here that we learn of the breakdown of common language (v1) at Babel. Because of man's arrogant desire to be in competition with God, God looks down at the tower and confuses their language, which results in the scattering of peoples (vv7-9). (As an aside, notice how v5 describes God coming down to look at the tower. The people intended to build a tower that ascended to the heavens (v4) as an act of self-achievement that would rival the greatness of God. In saying that God 'came down' to look at this tower that humanity thought was so massively impressive, Moses is employing a literary device to emphasize just how unimpressive the tower was in comparison to God.) From this point on, the lack of common language has frustrated communication.

Fast forward to the Acts 2 depiction of Pentecost. It is widely assumed in many commentaries on Acts that Pentecost reversed Babel. I largely dissent from this view. I agree with Larsen that Pentecost is not a 'reversal' of Babel, but a 'healing' or 'overcoming' of Babel. At Babel, humanity went from one common language to many. Strictly speaking, a reversal of Babel would be a condensing of many tongues back to one common language. That's not what happened at Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Spirit empowered a group of Jesus' followers to speak different languages in order to effectively communicate the Gospel in a multitude of tongues. In this account, language is not what is uniform. What is uniform is the message and content that is communicated through language. Pentecost transcends diversity in language with one common confession that begins to bring the peoples of the earth back together under God. In doing this, Pentecost heals the confused scattering of peoples at Babel.

What does any of this have to do with hospitality and the immigrant community?
Several things:

First, Pentecost affirms the value and legitimacy of a multitude of languages. Pentecost demonstrates that God doesn't have a human language pecking order when

it comes to the communication of his Gospel. It is because of this that missionary organizations and other international ministries are intentional about translating the Bible and scholarly Bible curricula into other languages, rather than insisting on non-English speakers learning English as a prerequisite to understanding the Gospel. What's true on the mission field is true in our neighborhoods as well. We may be in an English speaking country, but Pentecost does not provide warrant for speakers of English to adopt a stance of superiority over their non-English speaking neighbors. Even if we think that English should be the official language of America that everyone should speak, we must still realize that English is not the official language of God anymore than Spanish, Japanese, Kazakh, or Swahili.

Second, because there is no human language pecking order with God, we should not think that learning another language is an act of moral sacrifice on our part. It has been argued that learning Spanish in an effort to better communicate with Latino immigrants somehow encourages immigrants not to learn English and contributes further to our language chaos. The opposite is true. In learning other languages, not only are we enriched personally, we actually get ourselves in line with the early church. The NT was written in koine Greek even though Aramaic was widely spoken at the time, and Hebrew was still being used as a liturgical language. Further, becoming comfortably bi or trilingual reduces language chaos by increasing understanding in communication. Like Pentecost, our ability to transcend diversity in language with a common message brings the nations together under the rule of Christ. It is, in effect, a form of linguistic hospitality. Going back to lesson 1, it is an incarnational approach of entering their world to encourage them to enter ours for our mutual benefit under the superintendence of God.

It is rightly argued that much relational strain is the result of a lack of clear communication. This is true in marriage, parenting, vocational and ecclesiastical relationships (on the latter, see especially the 'filioque' debate between Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy). It is no secret that distrust and suspicion can fester and grow in an environment of poor communication. Part of what it means to be hospitable is to work hard at overcoming such hurdles. To be able to communicate with our non-English speaking neighbors is to communicate welcome to the marginalized and isolated. Arguing that immigrants only have themselves to blame for their own marginalization misses the point. We are the ones who have been commissioned to take the Gospel to the nations, without caveat. To do so hospitably communicates the kind of welcome that can motivate our immigrant neighbors to try and communicate with us better, and become valued guests of God in his house of nations.

Christian Hospitality – A Way of Life

Week 10 – Hospitality as a Christian Ethic



The Pineapple – The Symbol of Hospitality

In this final lesson, we will attempt to bring together what we have learned. As we mentioned the first day, this course is merely a beginning of exploring how integral hospitality is to the Christian faith. What we have done in this course only counts as a beginning. Our study of the biblical data in the early weeks was not exhaustive, but was merely a beginning. Our later examination of hospitality in the home and church was far from complete, and was only a beginning. Our discussions of hurdles to hospitality only lasted about two hours, when we all know that the topic could occupy a lifetime of attention. And our interaction with hospitality and race and the immigrant community barely scratched the surface of the complexity of the issues involved. Our journey in Christian hospitality has just begun, and actually reinforces our status as sojourners who are on a pilgrimage.

A Recap

We have learned a number of basic things about Christian hospitality. Among them:

- Hospitality is about far-reaching attitudes as well as finite actions.
- Hospitality entails both openness and boundaries.
- Hospitality is essential in gospel transmission and in developing a uniquely Christian ethic.
- Hospitality affirms human dignity as beings created in God's image.
- Hospitality welcomes the stranger and increases the fidelity toward God of both host and guest.

- Much of the ministry of Jesus can be viewed within the prism of hospitality.
- Barriers to hospitality have always existed, but they can be overcome.
- God shows up in hospitality settings, because he is a hospitable God.
- The ministry of the church can be viewed through the prism of hospitality.
- Hospitality is a doorway through which people can discover God and become his eternal valued guests.
- The Kingdom of God can be viewed through the prism of hospitality.
- Hospitality involves sustained attention, flexibility, and times of rest.
- Hospitality challenges many cultural trends that contribute to the breakdown of relationships and community.
- Hospitality offers a prime setting to find common connections between different people and build relationships off of them.
- Hospitality is basic in our ministry to the poor, the lonely and the isolated.
- Hospitality is a process and outlook, not an event or location.
- Hospitality impacts us all, and all are called to participate in it.

Hospitality is an interrelated part of our overall ethic as Christians. We should not view hospitality as a stand-alone component of the Christian life. Rather, one might do better to think of hospitality as a major ingredient of a soup that along with other ingredients, contributes to the overall taste and enjoyment factor of the Christian dish.

Two Case Studies

In order to demonstrate how far-reaching the implications of hospitality are, two case studies will be presented – one negative, one positive.

Negative:

Today's teenagers, college students, and young professionals have grown up in the era of broken families and absentee parenting, surging technological advance, and scattered commitments. All of these dynamics have greatly influenced how these folks define normalcy for themselves. All of these trends have helped normalize attitudes of isolation, superficiality, and detached commitment. One result of this has been the emergence of the 'hookup culture' in many urban and suburban areas. This culture shuns meaningful interaction and deep relational connection in favor of random physical pleasure that is detached from emotional and spiritual intimacy.

Contrary to popular opinion, the 'hookup culture' is not solely the result of our hyper-sexualized society, though it is clearly a contributing factor. The 'hookup culture' has become mainstream because isolation, emotional detachment, loneliness, and lack of relational depth have become normal. Right before our eyes, we are seeing an entire

generation that truly believes that detachment rather than intimacy is normal; that relational breakdown rather than relational stability is normal; that random sex rather than committed romance is normal. Many of these folks simply don't know any different; it's what they saw in their homes growing up, it's what they see on TV and at the movies, and it's even what's been modeled for them in the church. Random superficial hookups make sense in the random superficial world their jaded eyes see.

Without knowing it, the church often exacerbates this problem because its approach to hospitality and relationship-building is likewise superficial and surface-level. Teenagers and young adults who attend church are not immune from embracing the kind of superficial detachment that drives the hookup culture. A church can be just as superficially detached as any other place. It is authentic Christian hospitality that fights against this, and shapes the church into a caring and committed community that needs each other and loves each other at a very deep level. It's not enough for a church to be consistent in its teachings on sex, love, marriage, and relationships. Young adults who have grown up in an age of skepticism will know whether the church really believes its verbal teachings by how rich and deep its practice of hospitality is. If the disconnect between the two is significant, the teachings will lose their force, and we will unwittingly be validating the very cultural trends we are fighting against. Hospitality is what helps us as a church to comprehensively tackle the underneath trends and attitudes that prop up the hookup culture.

Positive:

A local church has an active ministry to single adults. Many of the single adults were previously unsaved and mostly unchurched when they first came to this congregation. Prior to being saved, many of them freely indulged in much of what we've discussed above, because that's what was normal and accepted in the circles they ran in. Once saved, these single adults desired meaningful connection with other fellow singles in the church. So the church began a weekly singles group to encourage this kind of healthy fellowship. These singles groups proved to be real eye openers for the church.

During the first few months of the weekly gatherings, the Pauline clash between the old self and the new self (Rom 6-8; Eph 4.22-24; Col 3.9-10) was on full display. The single ladies of the group desired relational connection while still dressing provocatively and acting suggestively. The single men of the group desired relational connection while still treating women as objects and behaving boorishly. The singles ministry church leaders knew they had a problem on their hands. Through hospitality, they set out to train their singles to unlearn the destructive norms of their former lives and set forth a consistently Christian model of relationship and connection.

Ministry leaders invited the single adults into their homes not just to talk about proper Christian behavior and attitudes, but to demonstrate them. Hospitality provided a platform for the single adults to see how their ministry leaders interacted with each other and their spouses as applicable. They saw deep consistent connection, abiding respect and care, and emotional affection and value, all under the acknowledged rule of Christ. In other words, they saw hospitality at its best.

This experience over several months greatly helped shape a new kind of normalcy in the single adults. A number of these single adults matured into able ministry leaders in the church who now pass down what they've learned to newcomers through their own extensions of hospitality. By gaining an appreciation of the link between hospitality and proper Christian orientation, the overall conflict between the old self and new self is no longer a draw.

Hospitality and the Frontier

In this section, we will briefly look into two additional areas where hospitality is a pressing issue in our day. It is hoped these snippets will spur more sustained thought long after this course is over.

Hospitality and the Youth Culture:

We've already discussed this above, but there is much food for thought here. We will focus on one issue – non-dietary body modification.

Tattoos, piercings, implants, and other forms of body art have become increasingly mainstream in the youth culture. Shopping malls across the country are heavily populated with such youth, including our own local mall here in Springfield. Many Christian adults look upon these masses and are tempted to conclude that these youth are truly the lost of the lost. We tend to be either very scared of them or very sad for them – or both. Clearly, such sentiments can and will impact our hospitality approach with them, and it's a serious issue since our teenage kids probably know some of these kids and might be friends with them. They're in our neighborhoods and in our schools. The question is whether we want them in our homes and churches.

Believe it or not, we can find common connection (and even common cause) with the youth culture regarding body modification. And this means our whole outlook on hospitality towards them can be more welcoming and less fearful. The serious body modification community is deliberately counter-cultural. They are intentionally rejecting the impersonal nature and blandness of modern society. Tattoos and piercings are very personal, and help tell the story of their owners. This community, through the permanence of body modification, is criticizing the breakneck speed of

society and its accompanying forgetfulness. To them, body modification affirms the value of memory and commitment, and is a source of grounding and stability.

Of particular importance to women is that the youth culture's version of body modification constitutes an absolute rejection of the culture's view of female body image. They are criticizing the dominant cultural standards of beauty for women and are breaking free from the tyranny of such controls and standards. Any parent of a teenage daughter knows the sad irony that in our age of supposed female emancipation, there is a tremendous cultural tyranny being foisted upon us about how women ought to look. Eating disorders, constant makeovers, and skimpy attire are the outward expressions of severe body image issues that are constantly perpetuated and reinforced in our Cosmo and Abercrombie culture. Body modification is a complete rebellion from this destructive treadmill, and this is cause for a heartfelt 'Amen'!

Through body modification, the youth culture is in dialogue with the world, including us as Christians. Once we understand some of what motivates them, we find that we share many of their concerns as Christians, even if we disagree with how they express their concern. Like them, our theology of beauty should not be the culture's understanding. Like them, we should be constantly encouraging our daughters not to chase after the culture's destructive ideal of beauty. Like them, we should be developing a distinctive community that supports our values. Body modification, rather than being a sign that we're in a cultural wasteland, can be an opportunity for hospitable dialogue. These folks are talking to us without us even knowing it. Now that we have a better idea of what they're trying to say, it's time for us to talk back.

Hospitality and the Homosexual:

This is the elephant in the room that nobody wants to deal with, including me. Churches and denominations are being ripped apart over this issue. Our social and political discourse on this issue is highly partisan. As an evangelical church that believes homosexuality is a sin, what does hospitality to the homosexual look like?

Much like our discussion of the immigrant community, we should authentically welcome the homosexual into our midst and treat him well, but not end there. We must stress our common identity as sinners, and stress the remedy – forgiveness through the power of Christ to instill repentance and a changed life. What are some ways we can be welcoming toward the homosexual without celebrating the sin of homosexuality?

- Our preaching and teaching should not be obsessed with homosexuality or in railing against the 'homosexual agenda'. That doesn't mean we never talk about

it, but it does mean we factor our theology of welcome into our approach to preaching and teaching.

- As uncomfortable as it might be, we must remember that in a church our size, there's a decent chance that at least a few of our regular attendees and even members struggle with same-sex attraction. Same-sex attraction is not something that resides entirely outside the church. Our ministry of words and deeds needs to keep this in mind.
- Our ministries should be not only firm, but gentle. We are not a museum of saints; we are a hospital for sinners. The goal of discipleship is not condemnation, but restoration (Gal 6.1).
- Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world who was tempted by the **totality** of human sin (Heb 4.15). He does not limit his salvific scope only to people who struggle with some sins and not others. Jesus is the Savior of the homosexual just as much as he's the Savior of the alcoholic, the wife beater, and the tax cheater. This should be our church's cry to the world.

Summary

Scripture has too much to say about hospitality to relegate it to some peripheral ministry done by others. Scripture demands too much for us to stand pat in our present orientation. Fidelity to the whole counsel of God insists upon intensely grappling with the implications of biblical hospitality on our lives and attitudes. Scripture's view of hospitality is bold, challenging and often uncomfortable. Our tendency is to water down Scriptural teaching in order to resist the radical commitment it calls us to. We can see where that's gotten us as a church and as a world. We must allow Scripture to shape us, not the other way around.

It is my hope that this course has been helpful in shaping our outlook on hospitality and its importance to the Christian mission. It is my hope that our homes, our church, our denomination, and the global Christian movement will rediscover Paul's simple command to 'practice hospitality' (Rom 12.13). I hope our duly-elected elders will take 1Tim 5.10 seriously in discharging their duties to the flock of God. I hope these things because I am convinced that a vibrant and radical rediscovery of Christian hospitality will change the world and hasten the great Day of the Lord (2P 3.12).

Thank you for accompanying me on this journey.

Appendix – Some Ideas of how to Extend Hospitality

The following is simply a rough list of some ideas I have about how we as Christians and we as the church can extend hospitality.

1) We can endeavor to have one congregational meal per month, and invite our neighboring community to join us.

2) When we administer the monthly Lord's Supper and baptisms, our teachers should explain what we as a church understand their significance and meaning to be. In the act of baptism, the congregation at large is tasked to assist the parents in raising their covenant children. As such, it is a hospitable thing to include everyone in the congregation by explaining why we believe what we do. The same is true for the Lord's Supper. Not everyone can participate in the actual meal, but everyone should be participating in understanding its significance. There are different layers of welcome, and making our church's understanding of the Lord's Supper clear makes the meal more inclusive even to those who cannot partake. Just as our church building should be handicap accessible, our worship services should be accessible.

3) To the best extent possible, pastors and elders should be emphasizing home visits of interested visitors of our church. Phone calls are less personal than house visits. Personal pastoral attention is a powerful extension of welcome.

4) Our street sign should be talking about things we do as a church that we'd like the community to become involved in.

5) As parents, we should endeavor to know the friends of our kids and have them in our home if possible. If the neighborhood kids aren't in our home, where do we think they'll go instead?

6) We should be willing to periodically open our home to our neighborhood. When Helen and I did this when we first moved into our neighborhood, many long-standing residents commented that 'this is so great; nobody does this anymore!'

7) The visibility of the Koinonia ministry needs to be increased in our church. Particularly with Pastor Bob now on the Koinonia Board, there's no reason why Faith Church shouldn't be a lead player in mercy outreach through Koinonia. We should have a 'Koinonia Month' in our church every year to stress our commitment to easing the pain of the poor, many of whom are immigrants.

8) Every new member class should be invited to the home of a church member for a meal and fellowship. This increases community, and communicates to new members that we are a church that values hospitality. Hopefully, they will multiply that spirit in their neighborhoods.

9) Having people in our home doesn't have to be a grand affair. Perfectionism is the way of Martha Stewart, and is an enemy of true hospitality. Inviting people into our home gives them a very personal glimpse of us that better enables meaningful relationships to develop. It is a joyous practice to have neighbors in our homes, and this needs to become part of the DNA of our church.

10) Our worship style could be more flexible, gently incorporating healthy facets of different cultures to broaden our appeal and increase interest in Christ.

11) Elders and deacons can be more intentional about getting to know the folks in their assigned care groups.

12) The church could have a weekly designated elder available to answer questions from newcomers and pray for visitors if asked. This communicates that the church wants to know the people who visit and minister to them on a more personal level.

13) We can include our neighbors on our Christmas card list, even if we don't really know them. Helen and I did this one year, and we got an amazing response. Our neighbors wanted to visit with us, and we even got a present from one of them.

These are just a few ideas, and some are probably better and more realistic than others. I would encourage each of you to come up with your own lists, and to send that list to Len Deibert. I know he appreciates your honesty. Moreover, when it comes to the importance of hospitality, he gets it.