

Feb. 5 Radical Hospitality
Romans 15:7
Matthew 25:31-46

Duane and his wife, farmers, actively participated in their local church. **Each** Sunday a visitor came to the church, Duane invited that person, and family, to eat lunch with his family after church at an area restaurant.

Mrs. Gangwish, also an active member of her church, invited people from church to Sunday dinner after worship. No matter how many people she invited there always was only one chicken.

Both Duane and Mrs. Gangwish extended hospitality but only one is radical hospitality

While I was still working with American Baptists in Nebraska, several of the American Baptist churches had chosen to study the book, Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations. As God's people we are to bear fruit, John 15. This book identifies five practices that contribute to being fruitful. Beginning today, and for the upcoming four Sundays, we will take a look at each of the five. And yet, we can only scratch the surface in a 25 minute sermon. Today we consider Radical Hospitality, the first of the five practices.

Why do we come to worship on Sunday mornings? Out of habit? Because we are supposed to come to church on Sunday? Let me put forward two reasons for Sunday worship:

- ◆ We come to praise and honor God; to show reverence and gratitude for Jesus Christ; to wait on and anticipate guidance/help of the Holy Spirit. We come to be in the presence of God as the family of God, the body of Christ.
- ◆ AND when we are here we are to provide a place where those not familiar with God, Jesus, Spirit can come, be welcomed, be accepted as they are, and to experience God's love for themselves so ultimately they will want to connect with God

It is a "Both-and." We come to worship for our own spiritual growth AND we come to help those who don't know God to learn about God and God's love. We come to extend Christian hospitality to those who have yet to experience it.

Rev. Schnase, author of the book, has a rather long paragraph explaining Christian hospitality (refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers. Pp.11-12)

Rather than read it; let's work our way through his description: Christian hospitality is an active desire, something we choose to do, something we want to do

- ◆ Christian hospitality means: Inviting, welcoming, receiving, caring
- ◆ 'Christian hospitality is extended to: Strangers, those not familiar with who Jesus is and how Jesus can transform their lives
Strangers, those not familiar with what it means to be part of a church family
- ◆ Christian hospitality is: Genuine love. We read that young adults, millenials, want authenticity – not the superficial but the deep down expression of what we really believe, who we are at our core. They want to see us living out our beliefs, not just going through the motions and saying the right words.
- ◆ Christian hospitality is: Outward focus – reaching out to those we don't know yet
- ◆ Christian hospitality is: Care and concern – our love for others takes precedence over our own comfort and convenience
- ◆ Christian hospitality is: Openness and adaptability, willingness to change behaviors to accommodate others, to incorporate the ideas, abilities, talents of newcomers into the ways we function here as the FBC family and as God's people

There is a lot to Christian hospitality!

Hospitality is not a new idea. Hospitality was central to society in Old Testament as well as in Jesus' day. As travelers arrived in a town or village, there would have been no McDonald's or Omelette Shoppe; no Best Western or Marriott with comfortable beds and 2

warm showers. Travelers often were dependent on local residents to offer food and a sheltered place to sleep. Otherwise, they ate what they carried with them and slept on the ground.

Stories of hospitality or the lack of hospitality are found throughout scripture.

- ◆ The sin of Sodom included the men of the town threatening male visitors rather than receiving them and offering them food and lodging.
- ◆ Abraham's servant seeking a wife for Isaac asked Rebekah's father, "May I remain here tonight?" and was offered food and lodging
- ◆ Abigail provided food for David and his men after her husband Nabal refused, a refusal that could have endangered Nabal and his entire family
- ◆ The prophet Elijah asked a widow for food. Reluctantly she agreed, even though she had only enough oil and flour for one day

In the New Testament, also, we read of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, dear friends of Jesus, with whom he stayed when he was in Bethany.

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the disciples to go out two by two, taking nothing with them. Where they were invited in, they were to stay and receive hospitality. Where hospitality was not extended, however, the disciples were to "shake the dust off their feet" and move on.

Extending hospitality is integral, is woven in, to who we are as God's people.

We can sum up the importance of hospitality--inviting, welcoming, receiving and caring for others--by looking to Jesus and the example he set for us, reading in Matthew 20:28: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." We are to serve, to show hospitality, even the stranger.

So what is the difference between hospitality and radical hospitality? Radical hospitality requires us to go beyond expectations, to do more—to offer more—than the minimum required. Let's look at the ways we can offer radical hospitality to two different groups of people.

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To those who don't regularly attend this church, who visit on their own initiative

Remembering that "Hospitality has us seeing people as Jesus sees them and seeing Jesus in the people God brings before us" (p.13) how do we welcome, receive and care for visitors?

--Again we look to scripture for guidance. Our passage from Matthew 25 included this verse: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35)

--You are to love the stranger, the alien, for you were strangers, aliens in the land of Egypt Deut. 10:19

This commandment to welcome the stranger is repeated several times in the Old Testament:

**Deuteronomy 24:17-24 – justice for the alien, provision for the stranger

*Leviticus 19:34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

For the visitor, who comes uninvited, hospitality begins with the greeting at the front door and then continues with being welcomed warmly by those in attendance for worship on this day.

Retail stores have learned the importance of greeting people as they walk through the door: Meijer and others. I've been to DeWeese Hardware maybe three or four times now. I will go back: someone greets me and asks if they can help me find something. They don't hover around me, they don't follow me around the store, but they let me know they will help if I need assistance. A couple of days ago, I walked in needing two screws. I looked where I had found other screws, washers and nuts. But I found nothing like the screw I had taken with me. Finally I allowed the hardware employee to help me: quickly I had two screws, cost: 15 cents each. Because I am treated so well, I will return to DeWeese for other hardware purchases. I feel welcomed even though I obviously don't know much about hardware and don't know how to ask precisely for what I need. I think there is an entire sermon on just this experience!

If retail stores understand the importance of hospitality, of making people feel welcome, shouldn't we as Christians be even better in the practice of hospitality? Shouldn't we extend radical hospitality?

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For those who visit FBC, uninvited, we are to welcome them, make them feel at home from the very first contact we have with them as they walk through the door. We are to receive them with warmth, willingness to sit with them, answer their questions, assist them if they are unfamiliar with worship, or simply unfamiliar with our worship. We are to extend radical hospitality.

Those we invite to attend worship with us at FBC—the second group

- ◆ God's grace prepares people to receive an invitation – It is God's Spirit who makes people ready to be invited to church. Our invitation simply gives "legs" to God's grace. God allows US to be the human instrument of God's love

- ◆ Churches offer what people need
By inviting people to attend, to participate, to assist with a mission project, we are providing an avenue by which God's Holy Spirit shapes the human soul, Through such ministry, the Spirit fills the empty spaces of people's lives. Isn't that a fantastic gift from God—giving us the opportunity to be God's hands and feet?!

We are to invite people to church, to experience God's love and to learn how to connect with God.

So the question is: How do we extend radical hospitality

Welcome and opportunities for engagement when those who come desire to become involved.

Example of in the front door, out the back door

Groups were so well established, they unintentionally were closed to new people (breaking into the "clique"). Church groups become impenetrable to new people

God uses newcomers to breathe new life into congregations

Inviting those in the streets to the wedding banquet Mt. 22:8-9

Hospitality is prayer, work, habit, practice, and initiative for the purposes of Christ

Hospitality is a quality of spiritual initiative, the practice of an active and genuine love, a graciousness unaffected by self-interest, an opening of ourselves and our faith community to receive others.

Matthew 25 – when did we do this for you?

I was a stranger and you welcomed me Mt. 25:35; just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me Mt. 25:40

Romans 12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

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

- James 2:3-5 – do not favor the well-dressed, the rich over the poor
- Matthew 5:43-44 You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.
 - Colossians 3:11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

Welcome opportunity for a discussion group to come together for a couple of hours, perhaps over lunch, to wrestle with what radical hospitality would look like for FBC. Let me know if you're interested.

Study Group – 6 weeks

*How did you become a part of the Body of Christ (any church)

*What brought you to this church

*Theological meaning of the church as the Body of Christ. The "why" of invitation, welcome and hospitality. Why do we invite and welcome people into our congregation?

*The greatest gifts we have received through the church from our relationship with Christ

One more gift/contribution: to invite someone; to make welcome someone

*Why do people need Christ? Why do people need the church?

Why do people need this church?

A relationship with Christ – translate into everyday life

Hope, to know they are loved, God loves them; they have value, their life has significance; they are not alone