

WELCOMING THE STRANGER



Scripture:

Isaiah 11:1-10

¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Paul speaking to the new church community

Romans 15:4-13

⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”;¹⁰ and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;¹¹ and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹²and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

HOSPITALITY

This passage from Paul to the church in Rome has a lot to do with being hospitable. Hospitality is a key skill for surviving well in life. When we practice hospitality we are practicing a survival skill that began in ancient days. Last Friday night we had our hospitality time in the narthex here after the Vespers Service. People gathered and talked and drank tea or coffee, ate cookies and bonded. I learned that one of the newcomers grew up in Minnesota and her family had originally been homesteaders in Iowa.

Without the hospitality provided last Friday night, I would not have had a chance to meet Darla and discover we had something in common. Building networks with one another builds up the person and the community.

There are different kinds of hospitality and various ways to learn how to be hospitable. I have learned a lot about hospitality from watching my dogs.

When a new friend comes into the house, my dogs assume that person came to see them. So they immediately give the new visitor lots of attention! Dogs are natural friend makers. Scientific research now shows that dogs play a constructive role in building social relationships for people. In a study of twenty-seven-hundred people, they found that dog owners were *five times more likely* to get to know people in their community than other pet owners. The mechanism involves walking one's dog out in the neighborhood. That makes sense, doesn't it?

I found this short poem on the internet that goes into more truth about what we can learn from dogs:

ALL I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFE I LEARNED FROM MY DOGS

**When loved ones come home,
always run to greet them.**

Run, romp, and play daily.

Be loyal.

Never pretend to be something you're not.

Eat with gusto and enthusiasm.

**When someone is having a bad day,
be silent, sit close by
and nuzzle them gently.**

**Thrive on affection and
enjoy back rubs and pats.**

**When you leave your yard,
make it an adventure.**

Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

**No matter how often you're scolded, don't
pout - run right back and make friends.**

Bond with your pack.

When you're excited, speak up.

**When you're happy, dance around and wag
your entire body.**

Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

Don't go out without ID.

Leave room in your schedule for a good nap.

Always give people a friendly greeting.

**If it's not wet and sloppy,
it's not a real kiss.**

HOSPITALS

Hospitality, forging bonds, making connections with others is life enhancing for all involved. Hospitals are so named because they are thought of as places of hospitality where you can find shelter, protection and healing.

Many hospitals were founded by churches out of their hospitality for meeting the needs of the community. The church I previously served as pastor in New Jersey was temporarily converted into a hospital during the revolutionary war to take care of all the people suffering from smallpox. At that time there was no known cure. The revolutionary war website says: During the 1777 Morristown winter encampment, while General Washington was headquartered there, the Presbyterian Church was used as a hospital for soldiers suffering from small pox. Many of the soldiers who died of smallpox are buried in the church cemetery. I found a History Channel video that re-enacts when this happened.

The following video was shown to the congregation. <https://vimeo.com/118863432>

The way the Presbyterian Church stepped up and provided hospitality by becoming a hospital when there was a great need is exactly how Christ taught us to be.

BUILDING A PLACE FOR HOSPITALITY

Christine Pohl is the Professor of Social Ethics at Asbury Theological seminary in Kentucky. She wrote an article called *Building a Place for Hospitality* to help churches revitalize. In the article, she describes the ancient history of hospitality. She says: hospitality involves sharing food, shelter, protection, recognition, and conversation.

Before there were inns, hotels, and restaurants, every stranger needed someone's hospitality. Whether they had resources or not, when people were away from home they were dependent on the kindness and generosity of others for their survival. Because of this, hospitality was a central virtue in most cultures and a pillar of morality on which society was built. Hospitality was understood as a form of mutual aid. Caring for the needs of strangers

was a normal practice that often resulted in mutual blessings. Our Bible reflects on this in many places.

**In Hebrews 13:2 it reads:
"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."**

Much of Jesus' life was tied to giving and receiving hospitality. He came into this world as a stranger, vulnerable to welcome and rejection. The story of Christ's birth is a story of denied hospitality and generous hospitality. Mary and Joseph were denied hospitality when the innkeeper said there was no room for them in the Inn. Those who have been rejected in their own lives can learn from this story of the birth of Jesus that God empathizes with those who are outcasts from receiving hospitality.

At the birth of Christ, there was no hospitality from humans.

Yet, Mary and Joseph show hospitality by receiving visitors: the shepherds and the Three Kings are allowed into their humble abode to see the baby Jesus. God's abundant generous hospitality is extended to both poor and wealthy strangers in the story by allowing them in to meet Jesus. As he grew, Jesus was a guest at many meals and dinner parties and instructed his disciples to show hospitality to others as if it was being done to him. And even after his resurrection he hosted his disciples for a fish breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

CONCERNS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Dr. Pohl's analysis of the history of hospitality found that "After the Reformation, concerns about showing hospitality by respecting and protecting strangers was recast into concerns about human rights in general. Protestant churches were enthusiastic advocates for human rights from the very beginning of their formation."

Dr. Pohl concludes her article by asking what we can learn from the history of

hospitality that suggests how we welcome the stranger today. She says the character of the people offering the welcome is crucial if the hospitality is to be life-giving. In other words it can't be insincere hospitality; it must be real.

Pohl suggests having a combination of discernment, wisdom, flexibility, humility and generosity. And she reminds that there is blessing and mutuality in hospitality. Both the recipients and the hosts benefit when gifts are shared.

Valuing the stranger and providing them a place in the community is so important. Programs that open into relationships are life giving to all. Making a place for the neighbor, an international student, alienated teens, and refugee families are good places to start, she says.

We are accomplishing some of this here at the Church of the Roses already. But I wonder if we could do more to build on the relational aspect of what we do. How can we share ourselves more than just our food and our money? I wonder where this church needs to step up to help our community with the homeless crisis that Santa Rosa is dealing with. How can we get to know our breakfast teens better? Salvador recommends making the effort.

When the people in a church family are determined to be hospitable, nothing is impossible, because God makes it possible.

Ever since the prophet Isaiah, God has been instructing us to "Share your food with the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. (Isaiah 58:7a)

Benediction: Hospitality is about welcoming people into your life and blessing them by sharing your light of hope and peace. As it said in our reading from Romans today, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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