

Hospitality

July 2, 2023
Matthew 10: 40-42

When I think of the gift of hospitality in my life, my thoughts go back to my internship in Grenada. Hospitality did not come with the offer of a cold cup of water but rather a cool mug of ginger beer. It was the Braithwaite sisters homemade brew and they were proud at the kick it delivered and the reputation it held for being the best in the family. The four sisters who carefully manufactured this spicy- bubbly concoction we're our hosts. The eldest sister, 96 year old Eunice had vacated her bedroom to make room for Alan and I. Alan and I had been shaken by robbers and the sister's opened their home to us as a refuge at night. Their 14 year old, half blind dog was our security system. The Braithwaite sisters of Grenada, offered us hospitality at a difficult time and their generosity and care transformed our fear to courage.

It is a priceless gift to be offered a cup of water, or to give a cup of water to another.

It is an important thing to be offered welcome, or to give welcome to another.

It is a valuable thing ito be offered hospitality, or to give hospitality to another.

I've experienced both sides of these realities in my life, and I bet you have too. To be given that cup of cool, refreshing water when hot, thirsty, tired, and fatigued changes everything. To be welcomed and given the gifts of hospitality by family or friends or strangers when hungry, exhausted, or unsure - Is the love of God made real.

And then there's the other side too - giving that cup of water to those who are thirsty, welcoming the stranger, offering hospitality to guests, expected or unexpected this is also God's love made real in us.

Jesus of Nazareth was well acquainted with the practices of hospitality – these practises were an important part of the culture of his day. To welcome the stranger, to give a sign of generosity, to offer hospitality – these were not casual matters; they were **of God**. They revealed God.

God's very character and nature is that of welcome and hospitality. God's love is wide open and without boundary or barrier. The stories of Scripture reflect this hospitable and the welcoming nature of God:

- God feeds God's people with food and quenches their thirst on their journey from slavery and oppression to freedom and new life.
- God invites God's people to the banquet table of grace and forgiveness.
- God welcomes the stranger and the searcher into God's love.

Jesus modeled his life on and shaped his ministry from the heart of God and God's heart is to welcome and care. Shaping his life and ministry in the ways of hospitality got Jesus into loads of trouble - welcoming the stranger and the outcast, eating with the tax collector, and the sinner, boldly and unabashedly proclaiming that God's love was for everyone everywhere at all times. Jesus' ministry was the very epitome of welcome and hospitality. He lived it. He believed it. He died for it.

What Jesus did and lived - became the ministry his followers were called to as well. Welcome the outcast. Welcome the stranger. Show compassion and hospitality to the hungry and to the thirsty.

This welcoming way was his consistent message, and the early Christian community took this to heart. And what a community of hospitality and welcome it was. Those who were considered outsiders, were given a cup of cold water, invited in, and offered hospitality at the table. It became one of the noted qualities of those early Christian communities of faith.

Hospitality continues as the fundamental call and defining character of the community of faith. To welcome the stranger, to offer the gift of hospitality is such an essential ingredient and practice of the Christian way and life. It is a deep and profound way of reflecting God into the world.

But - Why is it so hard?

Hospitality seems countercultural in an age and society where privacy and isolation are so normative. We have privacy fences and security systems. Rapidly disappearing are the front porches and the neighborhoods where people know each other. We're told to be on guard, to fear the stranger, to be suspicious. But the Gospel is all about hospitality and invitation - the love of God is welcome and inclusion at its core. Somehow we must move beyond what holds us back.

Welcome, hospitality, invitation--it is the way of God. It is the way of the community of faith. It is the way of living the Christian life. Jesus taught this way to his followers because it represented the nature and love of God and because it would build lives and communities of abundant faith, hope, and love. Welcome, hospitality, and invitation would be foundational in the experience of knowing the transforming love and power of God in this world.

Welcoming someone. Saying, "Hey, you're invited here!" Offering a cup of cold, refreshing water, or ginger beer or a coffee, in the name of the risen Christ - is really simple. It's direct and basic. And when we do so, like so much of the Gospel tells us, it grows. It grows into patterns and practices of generosity, inclusion and welcome that can change and build people's lives. Of course, we are realistic and we see the world for what it is, there is violence and hatred in this world, division exists at virtually every level of human life. But we, as followers of Jesus, are challenged to see more, do more. The gospel pushes us to ask what if we welcome, what if we give a cup of refreshing

water, what if we practice hospitality and open our hearts to other people? The result might be wonderful.

Kathleen Norris tells the story of a nun who, although she had Alzheimer's, still asked to be rolled in her wheelchair to the door of her nursing home so she could greet every guest. Said one nun of her sister in ministry, "She is no longer certain what she is welcoming people to...but hospitality is so deeply ingrained in her that it has become her whole life"

Today Jesus challenges us to welcome others. To offer a cup of refreshment.

Today, Jesus invites and includes us into the very heart and life of God.

All that needs to be said by us is:

Welcome. Have a cup of water. You are home.