

9-1-19

HOSPITAL(ity)

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Scripture reference: Leviticus 19:33-34 and Luke 14:1, 7-14

Let's take a little journey together this morning... Close your eyes and imagine if you will, walking into your church to the smell of freshly baked cinnamon rolls... As you get closer to that gathering space near the sanctuary, the smell of cinnamon rolls is joined by the smell of freshly brewed coffee... And then there are voices, and laughter, and you join in this great moment of hospitality... you have joined in with those who have come early to offer this gift, this invitation to be with the Lord...

Okay, you can open your eyes now.

When my free spirited, living in her own world, daughter Megan was about 7 years old, she was enjoying the hospitality offering before Sunday service and was discussing the whole activity with her very practical, academically oriented, 13 year old brother. She questioned him about why the church called this hospitality, and in his "I am becoming irritated with my little sister" voice, he responded with "because it is hospitable." Having taken a minute to digest this bit of knowledge, she was ready to continue the conversation and demanded, "Michael! It is a Hospital?"

I share this story with you today because I wonder if we really know what hospitality is all about. What does it really mean to be hospitable?

Ask any number of good Methodist hospitality committees and they will tell you the answer to that question is offering Coffee and cinnamon rolls- or donut holes - right? Their way of being "hospital", of taking care of all who enter. This offering is their gift to the church. Did you hear that? The OFFERING is their gift to the church --- it's not the coffee and rolls that are the gift, it is the offering that is the gift. A gift that makes people feel better. A gift that brings us to a place where we feel comfort; a gift that invites us in - to feel at home. And each time this gift is offered, we are doing just what the good Lord has asked us to do. We are receiving guests with good will; we are treating others with as much love as we love ourselves.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard much about how to receive hospitality, and we were left with this bit of advice. When we are in a position of receiving hospitality from others, we need to be gracious; we need to accept whatever that hospitality looks like with grace and thanksgiving. "If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored." (Matthew 23:12) We also heard about offering hospitality...

We are not to offer hospitality so that someone will return the favor, and we do not offer hospitality to only a chosen few. Hospitality is something we offer to ALL people. Jesus himself said: "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." (Luke 14:13) Is he not telling us to tend to those who need mending of some sort? Is he not telling us that when we reach out and offer hospitality - "when you give a feast" - to make this offering as a gift to others? In hospitality as God's church, we are offering people a place to get well, to mend brokenness, to become strong again. We are being, as Megan said, "hospital" are we not?

Looking through some of our history, I was taken aback when reading the book of Judges. The book of Judges is composed of stories from a rather lawless period in Israel's history. In the book of Judges, we read that the people had no king, no leader - which should have been God... Because they did not recognize this, they pretty much did whatever they felt like doing. There was chaos and brokenness caused by the selfishness of these people who did not recognize God as their true king. BEcause of their selfishness, these chosen people of

God were unable to connect with Him. Because they couldn't connect with God, they couldn't connect with one another, and because they couldn't connect with one another, they couldn't connect with others either. Their relationship with God was broken - their whole community was broken - and their hospitality toward others was broken. Losing sight of God led these people to a dark place where there was a tremendous breakdown of hospitality toward all - particularly toward strangers. Now, obviously, we are called to something better than this. To lift ourselves from that level of brokenness, that disregard for hospitality - to a place where we can be "hospital" to those around us, we must remember that we are children of God. We are not just persons created by God, we are THE PEOPLE of God. The people to live in his image, to carry out his will, to bring his message - we are those people - the people of God ...

As the people of God, life means more than just living as a Christian who knows God and follows the rules, it means living in the community of God's people. It means truly following the teachings of the new covenant created by the death and resurrection of Christ - the covenant that holds us to this teaching found in Matthew 22 "...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39) and "your neighbor" is everybody... By giving us this commandment, He is calling us to be in true community with others. The Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation. That's not to say that participating in events that draw large crowds is the answer - you know the fair, the races, a concert... that's not the answer because a crowd is not necessarily community. Community is much more than just being with a bunch of other people. Community means that we share our lives with others. It means that we ride the rollercoaster of good days and bad days with each other. Community means giving somebody a place where they feel welcome; showing them that they are worthy of our time and attention, of sharing our space. Community means taking care of each other, of being "hospital" and building a common relationship founded in Christ.

Church is such a good place to do all of that don't you think? And most of us make the assumption that church is where people will find that kind of care, that hospitality that says "you have a place" simply by walking through the doors. But community and hospitality don't just happen, they take intentionality. We can be a very friendly church and not be hospitable. Just saying hello to people and welcoming them to our worship is not true hospitality. True hospitality happens when a stranger comes into our midst and we give them a place, and they go from being a stranger to being a friend. True hospitality is a beautiful thing! It doesn't mean that those we are showing hospitality just take over the space, and it doesn't mean that we are to behave like, or become, something that we are not. What it does mean is that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable enough and caring enough to tell our "guest" that they have a place with us and we will make room for them.

The stories in our bibles make it clear that how we treat and relate to other people has a tremendous impact on how we relate to God. In keeping, if it is our desire to become deep, fearless Christian men and women, we must think about how we engage with each other right here in our own community of faith; and we must think about how we relate to people, how we care for people, how we show "hospital" to people outside of this community of faith.

And what if we thought of the hospitality that we offer as something we don't just offer to other people, but each time we offer true hospitality to somebody we are also offering that hospitality to our Lord... What if, just as we offer hospitality to others we strengthen our relationship with our Lord, what if there is hospitality that we offer to our Lord that strengthens our relationship with others... What if we considered that hospitality is NOT something we offer to other people, but is in fact what we offer to the Lord. What if we consider the idea that ALL we offer to the Lord is a means of being hospitable?

What do we offer the Lord? The _____ of us up here are offering our voices, our thoughts, our time to do his work, That is an offering right? We do this also as an offering to the Lord; our offering to spread his message, to give for him some of that which he has given us. Is that not also a means of hospitality toward each of you? We do what we do up here to help make you feel welcome in this place, to help you to know that you belong here.

All of us here in this room have gifts to offer in hospitality to our God.

Maybe what you have to offer is not standing up here in front of the congregation, maybe it is not early morning to serve coffee and cinnamon rolls, or donut holes; but you do have something to offer, a gift to give, in order to show hospitality, to care for each other and whoever else might walk through that door. There are so many options... For example, If you have the gift of just a couple minutes each Sunday morning, you could offer to light the altar candles. Perhaps you could offer your gift of patience and understanding for a Sunday or two in Sunday school to help our young people along their journeys. Is cooking the gift you have to offer? The community meal could always use another cook... Or perhaps your gift comes in the form of dollars and cents, what if you increase your tithing by 10% this year - that might be 10 cents a week or 10 dollars a week - it doesn't matter what your 10% is, just that you are making that offering... Each of these examples is an offer of hospitality, a means of caring for each other.

Maybe Megan wasn't so far off... the hospitality we offer here in this community of faith, is all about offering people a place to get well, to mend brokenness, to become strong again. maybe we are "hospital"... Let's just own that -

Let us use all of our gifts to do the work of our Lord, to serve one another, to be "hospital" and care for each other. With God's blessings we will. AMEN