

Radical Hospitality

Abraham's story about welcoming strangers makes us be impressed. Of course, there must be differences between culture and time. Let's read the story again.

Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. And he said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way - now that you have come to your servant.

It is like a vivid movie scene. What do you think is unusual about his attitude? Or is there anything that you don't understand why? What questions do you have about this scene? In my memory, in my eastern culture, hospitality is a sacred duty.

Abraham ran toward the strangers and bowed low to the ground. He didn't yet know that these three strangers were God at all. They were just strangers. He prepared the freshwater to wash their feet that walked through the hot day. And he made the best choice of food that was possible for them. There is one thing that is very surprising. It is what Abraham said to Sarah, "Get three seahs of the finest flour, and knead it and bake some bread." Do you know how many pounds three seahs is? It is 36-pounds of flour! Why did Abraham let her bake so much bread? It was for their continuous journey. It would have probably been used for one month for their trip. He was preparing for their further journey. He stood under the tree like a waiter to serve all their needs. This radically welcoming heart finishes with a radical blessing that Sarah would have a son the next year by this time at the age of ninety.

Hospitality is in Greek language Phil-xenia. It means love for the stranger or foreigner. In the ancient world, it means **loving or taking responsibility for the well-being of the stranger.** Social justice for those who are weak, the law of God made sure that they are protected and taken care of as in **Lev 19:34, "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."**

The plight of aliens in the ancient world was desperate. As an alienated person, the traveler often needed immediate food and lodging. Widows, orphans, the poor, or sojourners from other lands lacked the familial or community status that provided a landed inheritance, the means of making a living, and protection. God's heart was with them; they were continuously named for protection; they were widows, orphans, and the sojourners and the poor of the community.

It is unbelievable that Our creator God identifies Himself as a stranger, the weak, the lost, and the last. God graciously became a stranger into the human world that he created. The host of life became a guest on the earth. We remember that **Jesus' ministry on earth relied on the hospitality of others. Jesus identifies himself with the weak, the lost, and the last.** We read this in Matt 25: 35-40, "For when 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." Where this humble Spirit of God dwells, there is life revived, and warm humanity shared.

Jesus' Spirit is like the Spirit of water. It is radically different from the Spirit of the world. The world incites us toward upward mobility. Spirit of God leads us to downward like water. In our culture, when we prepare for guests, we tend to impress others by decorating the space, cleanliness, carpet, by matching colors and all. It is to elevate us.

But the Holy Spirit lets us focus not on me but others. The Holy Spirit enables us to focus on the heart of strangers and the need of strangers. When we genuinely humble before strangers, our humble God is there. In front of the meek and welcoming spirit, our hearts are unlocked, there is sharing of the life of pain, fears and disappointments. We feel the presence of God there. We enjoy the blessing of being together. The abundant blessings are shared on both sides. We can enjoy being in the presence of another person who is created in the image of God. We listen, we give them attention and savor the moment that God has given us. We enter the life of another, to bring them hope and help. In entertainment, we cannot have this joy because we are focused on self.

So, hospitality listens. An introvert can do this well. We don't need to say a lot. We don't need to boast all the greatness bragging about ourselves and our children. We simply ask meaningful questions such as **"Tell me about your story!", "What are your challenges, hopes and dreams?"** By listening carefully with compassion, we can enter into deeper intimacy, which is holy. Hospitality listens and honors people created in the image of God.

We live in a post-modern society, where all people are living in fear and anguish with victimhood, we can find people who are hurting and in need everywhere.

Where can we find this space? We can create this space without difficulty. It is to open our homes. It is to open our vulnerable heart and life. It is to invite others into that space. It is to encourage people to your table where people can share life without judgment. It sounds quite ordinary but radically transforming.

At the humble and loving table with food, we can relax and open in the Spirit. Healing and transformation will occur. We can provide a safe, loving, and welcoming place to make our stranger to our neighbor, and neighbor to the family of the faith community. Once a stranger becomes a neighbor, they cannot become strangers anymore; they stay as a neighbor. If they become a member of the faithful community, they cannot go back.

While preparing this sermon, I had a desire to make a welcoming space around the table where people frankly share their lives. Spaghetti Dinner tonight? **Everybody in the world needs belonging and the Lord of life.**

There was a woman named a Rosaria Butterfly, a professor, and a lesbian. She met a pastor Ken who invited people his home. The dinner was open to everybody and welcomed new people regularly. The food was simple, but plenty. There, she started to have a heartfelt conversation. She knew that there was someplace to go where nobody judged her. Whenever people were invited, she wanted to be there. She knew that She belonged there. There was a spirit of humbleness. The humble and loving presence touched the heart of the unbeliever and let them open their heart. They sang a song of praise, and they read a Psalm. She was at the open dinner table for two years and was transformed into a beautiful Christian who has a beautiful and powerful relationship with God.

The humble invitation to your table sounds quite ordinary. Still, it is radical because there is the radically different Spirit that flows downwards and that nourish people with love and warmth. If people eat and drink love, the dead spirit lives again. Love never fails. It is what Jesus taught us in the gospel. The radicalness of the invitation to your table is about the radically humble Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus, who is God, visited us as a stranger, meets us where we are in our neighborhood, on our level. Before Jesus, and even after him, most people assumed that God was at a great distance above us. God comes down. God meets us where we are, on our level, where we need God most. Not only that, but he also became a servant who washed the feet of his disciples. While we all climb up the ladder of success, Jesus walks out to the margins to hang out with the outcasts and outsiders, Jesus healed them, empowered them, showed them the way to the real life of freedom and joy. Jesus poured out everything he had. And Jesus sends us out as a stranger to somebody.

In his Spirit, we will have life. There, strangers are welcomed. Their names are the homeless, the sick, the poor, the unemployed, those who have special needs, the refugee, the immigrant, the alien, the minority, the different, the odd, the last, the least, the lonely, and the lost. The Spirit will invite you to hear their concerns, take them to heart, and join your heart with theirs. Your kind eyes and warm smile and gentle presence will speak a universal language of neighborliness, and at that moment, they will feel that God is real, for God's Spirit is alive in you.