

Ep 83 The Art of Hospitality

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Dominic Kaiser 00:06

Welcome to The Contemplative Life. Three pastors, friends and spiritual companions help us explore spirituality through a contemplative lens.

Christina Roberts 00:13

I'm Christina Roberts.

Chris Roberts 00:16

I'm Chris Roberts.

Kristina Kaiser 00:18

I'm Kristina Kaiser. We're glad you joined us.

Chris Roberts 00:21

Well. Good morning, it is great to be with you. Today, we wanted to talk a little bit about the art of hospitality. In the scriptures, Jesus repeatedly engaged with people in a way that offered mutual love and respect, going to parties graciously receiving their hospitality. And one thing that I find interesting is that Jesus never said, I'm for you, you're not for me. Instead, Jesus was open to this human experience of being with. And I think this is a big paradigm shift. So I want to open it up by talking about the art of hospitality and this notion of mutual participation in the lives of those that we come into contact with. So what do we think today?

Kristina Kaiser 01:18

Well, we were just on a little trip and our family needed hosting, which I always think is overwhelming, because there's six of us right? Our friend just showed us the beauty of abundance and all that there can be. She found a way to get four air mattresses, like Tetris into one bedroom. It was so lovely. And I have had some anxiety about traveling over the last couple of years. I just found her presence in the mornings to be so helpful and so calming. But we got to the end of our trip and there had been moments our youngest had knocked on her door pretty early in the morning one day, and I was like, No, don't do it. And she was like, Oh, I loved it. That was so wonderful. It was so precious. And let's do this again next year. I think there's just something about the connection that we receive, and the way that we enjoy abundance, in the context of

hospitality. We've talked in the past about those brain chemicals, the way that we experience relationships in the middle of it, the laughter and what that does for us internally.

Christina Roberts 02:36

I find it interesting that hospitality is something across every culture, every religion, every time. This is a hardwired thing for humans to both give and receive hospitality. And I remember years ago, being struck by a scripture where they were sort of noting attributes that one would have in a leadership position. And there's things that you would expect, like, generosity or things like that. But hospitality was listed as one of those things. And it was so interesting to me that back in the ancient church, this was something of such high value that they noted, if you're going to be a leader in this community, you need to be one that is hospitable. And so from that, I think I've really internalized that and noticed how hospitality breaks down barriers. It allows the connection like you're naming Chris, it's not the us versus them. But somehow we're just all humans sharing together. So I appreciate the span that hospitality offers.

Chris Roberts 03:30

One of the things that comes to mind for me is the notion of people who are in the caregiving profession or the help profession, whether you're a doctor, a nurse, you're a teacher, you're a pastor, where it's your profession to sort of care for other people. And I think, in these different professions, it's really tricky to have this notion of mutuality. I'm learning, I went to school, I'm doing all this to offer it to a certain set of people. People who are working with those who have mental challenges, I'm doing all this to help better society. And so I think one of the challenges that I've seen is, I can do this for you, but I kind of put up these walls and won't let your life interfere with me or touch mine in certain ways. And so as I bring that forward, this notion of the challenges of mutuality, what comes up for you guys?

Kristina Kaiser 04:40

I appreciate that you're naming that. I think, early on, someone said to me, you know, people are sometimes gonna want to do something nice for you because of all the things that you do for them and you need to say thank you and receive that. And that is a long struggle for sure. I resonate with what you're saying, because I often feel more comfortable giving than receiving. It is difficult for me to receive, to kind of sit back and take that in and let somebody offer me love. I always say, oh, no, no, let me help you. So it is actually a practice to be able to receive that love. So thank you for bringing that up.

Christina Roberts 05:25

I find there's a difference between receiving the hospitality of a meal or food, those sorts of things. And I wonder, Chris, if you're talking about receiving the hospitality of being seen and known, and having space to share your story in a hospitable setting? I think it's one thing, when I go to my spiritual director, I know that the expectation is for me to take up space in the room and to share my story and for it to be pretty centered on me. But I think in other settings, I'm very mindful of the others in the room. And I do think it's important, like you're mentioning, that there are times where my own vulnerability and needs to show up and to receive from their willingness to listen to me. I agree with you, I think that that's for those in the health profession, of which I am one of those, I think it's a role reversal. It's a paradigm shift. And I appreciate that about Jesus, which we named earlier that when he went into the settings, he didn't just teach it and give and impart. But there seemed to be a receiving that he did as well in multiple stories in the Bible. And so I think that's an important aspect.

Chris Roberts 06:27

It's funny that you mentioned, you distinguished between the breaking of bread, or eating together, versus being in a setting where there's the sharing of each other's souls. Where you're talking and sharing. And just noticing in a lot of our spaces, we've removed this idea of breaking bread, we kind of keep everything sterile, but how important eating together can be and how that sort of just is the great leveler. It just levels the playing field. I think there's something to be said when you sit down and eat a meal with someone. It just breaks down barriers. I think that's one thing that I find, I want to know, how do I bring the breaking of bread into my experiences? And it can be in small ways? Like, can I offer you some water? Or can I offer you a mint or a gum? It could be a small thing, but how can we bring these leveling of the playing field experiences into our setting?

Christina Roberts 07:35

I think it is important to distinguish because as we're talking about the art of hospitality, perhaps what comes to mind is Martha Stewart or Pinterest or something like that. The art of beautiful landscapes and tables and all of that sort of thing, which of course, is part of it. But I think what we're distinguishing here is the soul level of hospitality. As a contemplative person, what does it mean to offer whatever it is that we're offering on that level of food or the practicalities, but really creating a space where in that there could be the laughter or the fun or the comfortableness or the vulnerable sharing or whatever that might be which is a different type of hospitality that I think we're naming today.

Kristina Kaiser 08:11

Yeah, it feels a little bit like an ICU and that is difficult to experience. Because so much of our lives, like in the workplace, we might feel like, oh, I need to show what I know, or contribute in a certain sort of way. There aren't so many spaces where somebody just says, Thank you so much for being here. It's so good to be with you. And like looks you in the eye and means it in some way. And so food certainly can communicate that, beautiful spaces can communicate that, but there is something about even just sharing a glass of water and intentionally savoring this moment between us. I have I observed it maybe a year ago, and some new friends of mine, and they inspired me that when I am even on zoom calls now that I just want to be sure to see each person to look them in the eye and make as much connection and communicate that I am present with you as much as possible. It just changes everything. There's this closeness that immediately begins to bloom.

Chris Roberts 09:22

Yeah, I appreciate you saying that. And, you know, as we're talking about, it's interesting that we're using the word art of hospitality. And I talked to quite a few individuals that I guess they notice the hospitality that I offer. I think one of the things that you're bringing up is beautiful place settings and an inviting environment. I think I've definitely grown in hospitality over the years, but I think a lot of people can have the mindset of you're either born with it or you're not. Or you either have it or you don't. And I think I just want to note that this is something that can be cultivated, this is something that can be learned. And so it's trying this experiment and seeing how it goes. I'm trying another experiment. And one of the things that comes to mind as well is, you know, we had some individuals over recently, and it was kind of one of these crazy times where they were going to be leaving the country for a while. And I know we're scheduled to get together, but can we get together sooner because things are happening at a much quicker pace. Of course, we wanted to offer hospitality and make it happen, make it work, but it can kind of put us in a frenzied state, like we have to get the house ready. But then came a moment where, hey, it's more important to be settled and to be welcoming, rather than have the space, all nice and neat. I think back on that experience and it was the gesture of making something happen quickly. It wasn't, wishing the grass would have been a little bit shorter in our yard. I wish we would have picked up some sticks in our yard. I think one of the things that I noticed is, we didn't get to some of those exterior things, but we became very present whenever they were actually in the room. And they noticed that and they commented several times, thank you so much for making this happen. Thank you for the food, thank you for being present. For people it is probably more important than any place setting or exterior. And I say I think sometimes we can be distracted by the outward aesthetics, rather than the inward space that we offer to individuals.

Christina Roberts 12:10

100%. I agree with that. And I do think again, that's maybe some of the distinguishing factors that we're talking about today from the Pinterest versus the art of hospitality, on maybe a soul level. Getting a pizza from Costco and gathering around that. We've done that often this summer around the pool and invited our neighbors to join us for dinner, or the kids can invite friends. And we'll have a little gathering and it's not about the food. Sometimes it is about that. It's Thanksgiving or some special meal. But sometimes it's about just the gathering and the conversation and the fun. And I agree, I think sometimes we can put up these barriers, and we aren't hospitable because of some of these practical things that our minds that we think have to look or be a certain way, as opposed to just being and sharing and showing up.

Kristina Kaiser 12:53

When we're talking about art, I mean, every artist has a slightly different style. And so, you know, in one space, maybe it is their style to have it all set out. And when another person their style is to say, this is where the glasses are, you are always welcome to go and get a glass. And these are two different styles, but they're based on the person's style, right? And both can communicate a certain amount of love and connection and joy and relationship. I'm reminded not too long ago in a podcast, Chris was talking about how you would sit down for coffee with your friends. He would play pool before they would start talking. Again, it's just style and what we need. And I think spiritual directors, I met a spiritual director who specializes in directing through those like Dungeons and Dragons games. I am so unfamiliar, I forget what it's called. But that is so beautiful, because you can connect on a level that is specific to you. Is it role playing role playing maybe? I'm getting the thumbs up.

Chris Roberts 14:08

Yeah, I really appreciate your naming of style. And I appreciate your story. It reminds me just the other day, a tree fell down in our yard. And we were cutting it down and a neighbor walked by and he was talking to us. It touched him that we as a family were doing it. I had two of my children out there. One was inside cooking lunch for us with mom and and we were out there with the chainsaw, cutting it up. He just really enjoyed seeing us as a family. And he goes you're gonna pay them right? . So he said here, this is my style. He goes to the bank and he gets \$100 worth of \$2 bills, and he gave me \$2 bills to pay my children with. Then he told me he eats at this restaurant and this is what he tips the waitress with. He gives her three \$2 bills every time he eats there. And that's his style. That's him making his mark on the world. I think I think we all have a mark to leave in our spaces. And so I appreciate you naming that. I appreciate the conversation today. Thank you so much for having this conversation.

Chris Roberts 15:36

Well, now is the part of our podcast where we talk about what we are into. What are we into?

Kristina Kaiser 15:45

I have this Native American blessing that somebody introduced me to. It's an unknown author, but I liked it so much. It's on my fridge now. And it's short enough. I can read it for us here. So it goes, May the sun bring you energy by day. May the moon softly restore you by night. May the rain wash away your worries. May the breeze blow new strength into your being. May you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life. That is what is on my fridge and I am reading it daily this week.

Christina Roberts 16:31

That's beautiful. Thank you, Kristina. Well, I am into fresh cut flowers. We have some really sweet neighbors at the end of the street. And every weekend (they have a lovely flower garden) and every weekend they have a little wagon out front with holes cut out and they put bouquets of flowers for the neighbors to come pick up fresh cut flowers. So we've really enjoyed a lot of things like, cut flowers throughout the summer. We currently have beautiful Gerber daisies in a vase in the center of our dining room table, and it just brightens up the room. So I am really into fresh cut flowers from the neighbors.

Chris Roberts 17:03

Well, I am into something that sort of goes along with our theme. We are having some guests come this week, some students from a seminary and we have the opportunity to talk about this very thing of hospitality. It's kind of under a different heading. We call it being a good neighbor. And so one of the things that I've been into is what we call neighbor mapping. You draw a map map of your neighborhood and then you try to put names to the houses. And so I've been trying to do that. I think that's something that we want to do with these seminarians and talk about good neighboring and maybe even talk about some mutual experiences of how we've done that. So that is what I'm into... neighbor mapping.

Well, thank you so much. It's been a wonderful conversation. We'll see you soon.

Dominic Kaiser 18:01

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