

PRAYER: DEAR FATHER, HELP US TODAY TO BE SO CLOSE TO THEE THAT THAT EVERY DAY – THIS DAY AND THE OTHERS – WILL BE AN ADVENTURE WITH YOU. IN JESUS’ NAME. AMEN.

“ACTS – SHOWING THE CHURCH RADICAL HOSPITALITY”

Followers of Jesus must recapture the notion of “radical hospitality.” But what does this mean? It’s kind of trendy for Christians to claim to be “radical.” Makes us sound serious, on fire for Jesus, and (let’s be honest) maybe a little superior to our less-radical friends. But “radical” is related from the Latin word radix, which means “root.” According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “radical” can be used as either a noun or an adjective.

As a noun, “radical” refers to someone “believing or expressing the belief that there should be great or extreme social, economic, or political change.” As an adjective, “radical” means “causing or being an example of great change; extreme.”

So, yes, there should be “great or extreme” social and economic change. We should want to be agents of great and extreme change. But how do we hope to accomplish this? Through hospitality.

Hospitality is another misunderstood word. Hospitality doesn’t mean just having friends from church over for a Sunday roast, or watching the game with the guys. Understood biblically, and from the standpoint of the historic Christian tradition, hospitality is truly a radical idea.

The word “hospitality” has a long and interesting history. It does go back to Latin, and came to mean a “charitable institution to house and maintain the needy” by the early 15th century. Our word “hospital” obviously comes from this word.

This might help us to see the difference between our use of “hospitality” and its use in history. Do you go to a hospital to hang out with others from your same socio-economic bracket? Or do you (sick, hurting, or maybe critically injured and hanging on to life) rush to a hospital and expect to be cared for and healed, no matter what your background, race, or life circumstances? Obviously, the latter. This is the kind of hospitality for which we must strive.

Believers must reach back into our shared Christian history and seek to revive this older meaning of the word “hospitality.” It was, after all, Christians who started the first hospitals. Following the example of Jesus, the Great Healer, Christians established centers where the sick and dying could go and receive treatment, free of charge. This was a revolutionary event in human history.

When we turn to the Bible, we see an even more shocking use of the word we translate as “hospitality.”

Hebrews 13:1-2 commands us: “Let brotherly love continue, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The word translated as “hospitality” is basically derived from philos (love) + xenos (“stranger”) = “love of strangers.” We also see this Greek word used in two other passages in the New Testament. Titus 1:8 tells us that a leader in the church must be “hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and

disciplined.” We are urged in 1 Peter 4:8-9, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

Jesus captures this radical hospitality in Luke 14:12-14—“He said also to the man who had invited him, ‘When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’”

Biblical hospitality is costly. It is hard. When we open our homes to strangers, we are showing the deepest love possible. It is easy to love someone who is like you, who has it all together, who has given you favors or expensive Christmas presents. It’s quite another thing to love the homeless mother and her sweet babies who are used to sleeping on the floor, who throw their food on the floor, and scream for hours instead of taking a nap. That is costly love. That is loving strangers. That is welcoming the poor into your home. That is biblical hospitality.

We should not only be motivated by the Bible; we should also be inspired by the heroic example of our Christian brothers and sisters in the past. Christians have always sacrificed our time, our energy, and our resources for the sake of others.

So, we are motivated to invest in the challenging work of loving strangers through biblical hospitality by the Bible itself, and by the examples of other faithful Christians in history. But our final, ultimate motivation comes from Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Savior taught us: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

To show biblical hospitality requires sacrifice. We must die to ourselves in order to say “yes” to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of others. But when we do that, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, who took up His cross, and suffered on our behalf.

We were not the “deserving poor.” We did nothing to earn this grace, this love, and His divine hospitality. Jesus suffered for us, and he calls us and challenges us to suffer for others. But we dare not do this out of a grudging sense of Christian do-goodism. We don’t do this to earn approval, or to prove how holy we are. We do this because of the joy. We do this because of the joy that waits for us at the end of this process.

Why did Jesus endure the tortuous suffering of the cross? Hebrews 12 tells us: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We are surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses. We have a “founder and perfecter of our faith.” Let us run the race. Encourage each other. Learn from each other. Let us run this race with joy—knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ is pleased with us. Till we gather once again – in-person or virtually; walk with the Savior today and be a blessing! Amen.