

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalm 95:1-7a

Ephesians 1:15-23

Matthew 25:31-46

## Sermon November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### *Hospitality Leads to Hospitality*

As we enter the season of Advent and Christmas, we can be tempted to turn our attention inwards towards ourselves and our family/friend circles, as we start thinking about what new toys or gadgets or appliances or electronics, we would like for Christmas this year (**Image One**: a child dreaming of toys). Ask any teacher, and they will tell you that the children really struggle with their focus for most of the month of December as they get excited about all the presents they hope to get. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of employers would say the same thing about their adult employees. Some of us never really grow up when it comes time to Christmas (**Image One**).

And of course, along with creating our own gift lists, we also focus on what we need to get for those people in our family/friend circles. We find ourselves surfing website after website or going store to store looking for the perfect gifts. Sometimes dealing with slow overwhelmed modems, delayed shipping dates, lost or mistaken packages, a weak WIFI connection, large crowds of people, icy roads, pushy sales people. Scrambling to try and get every gift before the deadline of December 24<sup>th</sup>.

Then if our longing of and seeking out gifts doesn't consume all of our time and attention (**Image One**), we need to think of all the Christmas gatherings we need to attend and/or host. From work gatherings to family gatherings to church gatherings. For those gatherings we need to host, we have to think of all those things we need to purchase and do to be the perfect host. From cleaning the place from top to bottom to purchasing all those delicious foods. Including getting a big enough Turkey to feed the masses.

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, it is easy for us to turn our focus inward on ourselves and on our family/friend circles (**Image One**). Unfortunately, this tendency to turn our focus inward can also make it easier for us to neglect the vulnerable people living in our community.

This is probably why charitable organizations have to work so hard to try and get our financial and/or volunteer support during this time of year. They know many of us focus inward on ourselves, making it harder for us to hear their invitation. As well, there is so much commercialism out there telling us to buy, buy, buy for ourselves, and our family/friend circles (**Image One**). Charitable organizations sometimes feel like their voices are being drowned out. So, they send us mail, and more mail, and more mail. They call us, and they call us again, and again, and again. They even try and buy

some radio and television time to get their voice in there along with all the profitable organizations voices. Hoping they will catch us listening.

As well, they try so hard, because they know how isolated vulnerable people feel during the holiday season. This is probably one of the hardest times of the year for people who are struggling in poverty, or who have been rejected by their community, or who are in prison, or who are dealing with a death in the family or a break up or a mental illness.

With all the commercialism, the hyperfocus on gifts and gatherings (**Image One**), it is easy to focus inward on ourselves during this time of year neglecting the vulnerable people in our community.

In our gospel, Jesus invites us to show hospitality to the vulnerable people in our community. To turn our attention away from ourselves, and to be present with those suffering in poverty, those who have been mistreated, rejected, those who are in prison, those who are dealing with a death in the family or a break up. Those who are dealing with the challenges that come with feeling mentally unwell. Jesus invites us to show hospitality to the vulnerable people in our community (**Image Two**: Someone working in a community/soup kitchen).

Jesus goes on to say that when we show hospitality to others, we are showing hospitality to Jesus himself. Inheriting the kingdom of God, or in other words, receiving hospitality from God. Therefore, hospitality leads to hospitality.

With this being said, in every aspect of our lives, whether we are walking with the vulnerable people in our community or we are sitting at the table with people from other faith traditions or we are helping support a Refugee family or we are marching with a marginalized group near city hall or we are taking time to think of and be present with others outside our family/friend circle during the holiday season, we are showing hospitality to Jesus. We are experiencing hospitality with each other.

And this goes a long way in creating a better society where people have access to everything they need (**Image Two**). Where people can live in harmony and peace with one another. Where people don't feel isolated and alone during the holiday season. Where people are loved and respected. Where people experience the Advent/Christmas hope of hospitality, peace, and new beginnings.

Let us pray, gracious God, we are sorry for our tendency to turn inwards on ourselves at this time of year. Open our hearts and our eyes to turn outwards towards our community. Showing love and compassion to the vulnerable people in our community.

**Amen.**