

Sermon June 28th, 2020

God is Hospitality

In grade seven and eight I dealt with a lot of bullying behaviors from my peers. I lived in constant fear and anxiety, as I waited for the next person to make fun of me and/or physically hurt me in some way. There were many days that I didn't want to go to school. I didn't like the person I was becoming. Resentful and angry. I started taking it out on people who were more vulnerable than I was. The inhospitality I was treated with impacted my ability to be hospitable to others.

In grade nine in my homeroom class my fate changed. I met a couple of students who were very popular in our school who seemed to take a liking to me. Maybe they saw through all the walls that I built inside myself to protect myself from getting hurt. Maybe they felt sorry for me, and just wanted to give me a chance. Whatever reason motivated them to reach out to me, they did, and all of a sudden people's attitudes and behaviors toward me changed. People all over the school started to treat me with this unexpected hospitality that uplifted me and made me feel renewed. I was no longer afraid to go to school. The hospitality of those two peers helped me break down those walls inside myself, and moved me to be more hospitable to others.

To this day I remember those two people, and feel so much appreciation for their hospitality in a time of my life where I really needed to feel welcome.

Have you ever experienced inhospitality? Like, being bullied or left out by your peers. Or, you walk into a public space, and people look at you with disdain, because of something you are wearing or a piercing on your face or they don't like who you are hanging out with. Or, they don't like you, because you are not the right gender, or race, or ethnicity, or orientation, or height, or weight.

What happened to you when you experienced inhospitality? Did you feel fear, anxiety, anger, sadness? Did you start building walls inside yourself to protect you from getting hurt? Did this inhospitality make it harder for you to be hospitable to others?

Or what happens when someone you think would never show you hospitality does? Like, one of the people you thought would look at you with disdain comes up to you and welcomes you. Or, someone stands up for you when you are being treated badly for just being you. Or, someone smiles at you after a long line of people giving you dirty looks.

Experiencing hospitality can feel so uplifting. It can heal and renew us. This is why hospitality is so central to Jesus' message. The gospel is meant to be a message that breathes new life into us.

Look who Jesus is preaching to. Women, children, people living in poverty, people who suffer from physical or mental ailments. People who are seen as second- and third-class citizens. Victimized by the oppression of the Empire. Living in an inhospitable world.

So, Jesus offers them hospitality. Jesus welcomes them as they are. Jesus walks with them in their suffering. The disciples, the crowds watch, as Jesus' hospitality heals and renews the people he encounters. They feel empowered to reflect this same hospitality to others.

When Jesus is ready to send out the disciples, he warns them about the inhospitality they will face. But, Jesus also, encourages the disciples to reflect Jesus' hospitality to anyone who shows them hospitality. Hospitality genuinely leads to more hospitality.

Then Jesus turns his focus to the early Christian community and reminds the disciples that everyone in the community, even those who are living in poverty or who don't have the same gifts as others do, should be treated with the same hospitality as everyone else. Paul and the other leaders in the early church reiterate this message.

As, we continue to live in a world where many of us experience inhospitality. As, we continue to see people discriminated against due to race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. We hear our gospel this morning, and are moved to be a voice of hospitality in our world. A voice that challenges one another to welcome people where they are at, and to see that it is in the hospitality we show one another that leads to more hospitality and love being lived out in the world.

Working with people of other faith traditions and other Christian traditions in my interfaith and ecumenical work I have seen the power that hospitality

brings to our world. And sadly, I have also seen how much damage inhospitality brings to our world.

What I have witnessed in my work with people outside my own faith tradition is a hospitable love that moves me to love and welcome others with this same hospitality. In fact, the hospitality I have experienced from my interfaith colleagues has truly changed me into a more loving person. It has amazed me and at times humbled me.

In the words of our gospel this morning, and in my own experiences, I believe that when hospitality is present God is present.

This is why Jesus is so amimate for us to practice this hospitality, and to confront inhospitality in our world. Because it is in this hospitality that we experience the kingdom of heaven Jesus is preaching about.

The hospitality that says we are welcome as we are. Loved with an unexpected grace that seems to surprise us time and time again. Having access to God's healing and renewing message no matter our race, gender, orientation, ethnicity, height, or weight or anything else for that matter.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for your hospitality that heals us. Uplifts us. Renews us. May this hospitality burn within us moving us to be hospitable to others. And when we see inhospitality taking place in our world, help us stand with those who are victims of this inhospitality, loving them with the same hospitable love you love us with. **Amen.**

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