

Romans 15:7
Hebrews 13:2

Welcome Strangers!
-Radical Hospitality-

Oct. 2nd 2011

“So reach out and welcome one another to God’s glory. Jesus did it; now *you* do it!”
(Romans 15:7, *The Message Bible*)

Today the focus of our worship will be Radical Hospitality – one of five practices of fruitful congregations. What does that mean for us? Radical Hospitality is the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers, offering them the invitation of Christ and a spiritual home. Radical means that we are going beyond ordinary practices – outside the normal; that we want to exceed expectations and go the second mile (my experience in Warren). What can happen if our congregation extends Radical Hospitality? During the coming week, remember to be reading the devotions and prayers on Radical Hospitality in *Cultivating Fruitfulness*. I encourage each of you to read and pray for someone, using these devotions together.

Today is World-Wide Communion Sunday in which all Christian churches on earth celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion with the united spirit of Jesus Christ; we remind ourselves that we are connected with each other as the one Body of Christ in Christian faith. Scripture says: “And this one: Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together! And Again: People of all nations, celebrate God! All colors and races, give hearty praise! And Isaiah’s word: There’s the root of our ancestor Jesse, breaking through the earth and growing trees tall, tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope! (Romans 15:10-12).

With regard to radical hospitality, we listened to the Words of God: Romans 15:7 which says, “So reach out and **welcome** one another to God’s glory. Jesus did it; now *you* do it! (Romans 15:7, *The Message Bible*). Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not neglect to show **hospitality** to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 19:2). In those texts, I found two important words – welcome and hospitable – they remind us of who we are before becoming an important one of our church. A dictionary defines those words as: “Welcome”: “Received with pleasure and hospitality into one’s company or home; the act of welcoming; willing or glad acceptance”; “Hospitable”: “Disposed to treat guests with warmth and generosity; having an open mind; receptive.”

Examples of welcoming strangers or alien resident:

- Abraham’s inviting strangers into his house and offering them meals (Gen. 18:1-8); the Lord blessed Sarah that she would have a son.
- Tax collectors and “sinners” were welcomed to Jesus’ table (Luke 15:1-7); “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2); “Rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep” (v.6).

Jesus is concerned about the lost sheep as much as he cares for the saved one: Who is the lost sheep in the eyes of God? The work of church is to save souls; soul work is the primary work that the Lord desires us to focus on. “Invitation is our mission; offering God’s love is our work.”

Reflecting on my immigration life in this United States of America over 24 years, I am so grateful. I was an alien resident (green card) before, but I was welcomed. I also felt welcomed at schools where I studied as well as at churches in which my families lived – at Dormont and Mt. Lebanon UMC's. During my study at seminary, my classmates and I were invited to the houses of a few professors. Being appointed by the bishop and serving a new Korean church, using the building of Mt. Lebanon UMC and living at the parsonage of Dormont UMC, I was a stranger or alien to both congregations. Although I was treated curiously at first, later I became a friend of them; they welcomed, accepted, and regarded me –my family and congregation- as a part of their church family. They showed their acceptance and Christian hospitality; they practiced **open heart, open mind, and open door.**

Later on when I was appointed by the bishop to the Houston and Bentleyville congregations, you welcomed as well as showed me and my family your Christian hospitality. I was an alien resident to this community; I was stranger to you – different color of face, different English accent, different cultural background, and so on. But you welcomed me and my family into your church and helped me to be engaged with you. Some of you invited me into your homes and showed your hospitality to me. Furthermore, you regarded me with respect, love, and care as I ministered to you. Through the love of Christ, we have become a family of God and strive to fulfill the mission of the church: **“Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”**

We who follow Jesus – we the church – must also practice the kind of radical hospitality Jesus offered. Bishop Robert Schnase, in his book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, writes, “Following Jesus’ example of gathering people into the Body of Christ, inviting them to the banquet of God’s gracious love requires intentional focus on those outside the community of faith. Jesus’ example of hospitality demands an unceasingly invitational posture that we carry with us into our world of work and leisure and into our practice of neighborliness and community service. Hospitality is not simply something we do; it is an attitude. It is our posture as a church.

Each and every one of us likes to be treated hospitably, and we desire to treat others in the same way when they are in our homes. Yet the church does not always practice hospitality in a radical way. The followers of Jesus have no choice but to practice Radical Hospitality...Radical Hospitality is in our DNA.

What often happens in the church on Sunday morning is not that the church folk are in and of themselves unfriendly. What happens is that too many people in the church think that hospitality is someone else’s job, to be taken care of by the people with titles such as the ushers or the greeters or the pastor.

Radical Hospitality is necessary for the church to practice if it wants to be a vital place that attracts people. Schnase writes, “People are searching for churches that make them feel welcomed and loved, needed and accepted.”

“The hospitable one looks for God’s redemptive presence in the other, confident it is there, if one only has eyes to see and ears to hear. Hospitality is always a spiritual discipline of opening one’s own life to God’s life and revelation” (Amy Oden, 14-15).

**“So reach out and welcome one another to God’s glory. Jesus did it; now *you* do it!”
(Romans 15:7, The *Message* Bible) Let it be so by the help of God. Amen.**