

“The Ministry of Hospitality”

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1 Peter 1:10-16; 22-25

Luke 24:13-33a

‘28 As they came near the village to which they were going,
he walked ahead as if he were going on.

29 But they urged him strongly, saying,
‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening
and the day is now nearly over.’

So he went in to stay with them.

Luke 24:28-29

Let us pray... O God,

Thank you for the nurturing love of family and friends.

Thank you for the kindness of strangers along the way.

Thank you for the fellowship of Christian community
that can blend us together.

Amen

The first time I heard of such a thing as a ‘ministry of hospitality’
was in relationship with The Potter’s House in Washington, DC.

The Potter’s House is one of the oldest Christian coffeehouses
still active since it opened in 1960.

I went there for the first time in 1990
and it was a storefront in the NW district
with a cafeteria style breakfast and lunch.

The inside walls were large wooden panels, the walls of an old barn
and filled with paintings by local artists.

There were worship services two nights a week, after hours
part of the ministries of the Church of the Saviour and
once a month there was an open mike for local musicians.

But you wouldn’t really know it was a Christian establishment
except for the book store in one corner.

It was just a place for people to gather and socialize,
have a nice home-style meal and coffee to drink.

That was it –
just a place in the community for people to be.

Another intentional ‘ministry of hospitality’ was St Andrew’s Place
also related to the Church of the Saviour
which was actually a row house walk-up
with modest rooms for \$15 a night – back in 1990.

Willard, p.2

That was not the first time I experienced a 'ministry of hospitality'
though it was before I knew there was a name for it.

For there have been many times in my life when I have
benefitted from the kindness of family, friends,
even strangers who took me in on faith.

That was a time when I was literally on a spiritual journey
that was also geographical.

And this was alternately while I was in the service, in seminary,
and for about 10 years after graduation.

I was semi-nomadic, generally working in youth ministry.

It was a time of learning about liturgical arts and performing and teaching
and in the course of my travels I got to know folks all over the place
and in the summer of 2000, I went clear across the country
to volunteer at the Grunewald Guild –
a Christian artist conference center
and along the way I camped or stayed with people I met
on earlier trips along the Way.

And from time to time, I hear the call to go on a road trip –
though at \$4 a gallon these days,
there would have to be a pretty good reason for it.

And I don't necessarily recommend that others do this,
but you might give it a thought for yourself
if there is some place you have to be.

And when you find yourself going where you might not otherwise go,
usually God has something to do with it.

But I was talking about the 'ministry of hospitality' –
and that's not about being on the road;
It's about *being there for* others who are on a journey.

A 'ministry of hospitality' is about helping sojourners feel like they're home.

I believe there is a real art to that –

basically what it takes to make a house a home,
and some people are uniquely gifted in creating a space
for raising a family and for welcoming guests – even strangers.

Hopefully, what happens here at church is like that –

we have our family where everybody belongs
and some of you even have your own seat.

Hey, you paid for it... and thank you for letting others sit there...
on occasion.

Willard, p.3

I know a man who is in his 80s now and
and lately he takes in Iraq war veterans to live at his house.
For awhile he had been taking in cancer patients –
like himself, at one point.
Recently, he took in a homeless man who had a sign that read,
“Will work for food” and gave this person an opportunity
to take a shower and get something to eat
before going home to family.

Chris Farlekas has been doing this kind of thing for years.
Like the Good Samaritan –
as opposed to the un-streetwise priest and Levite,
Chris knows what the risks are and how to respond to the needs.
He starts everyday by meditating
about people he knows who are in need and
about being open to help people he may encounter.
He is truly someone who is about what it means to be “open and affirming”.

Now to the lesson...

Two disciples are walking on the road to Emmaus –
and there is some speculation by modern scholars about their identities.
One is named Cleopas – who may be the husband of Jesus’ Aunt Mary
and King Herod’s steward – or resource manager.
The other was thought to be Luke – the author of the Gospel,
or could very well be Aunt Mary, Cleopas’ wife.
Either way, we have an illustration of Jesus’ followers traveling in two’s
which is in keeping with earlier stories of the disciples
on their first missionary adventures.

These disciples don’t recognize the Risen Christ,
but invite him to stay with them for a meal.
It would seem that this stranger would also be expected to spend the night
which gives us a perspective on the societies of this day
as being inclined to give travelers a safe place to stay
as well as a meal.
It is not clear if they had arrived at someone’s home or a wayside inn,
but I would imagine there were no road signs for easy accessibility
and no Hilton style accommodations when they got there.

Willard, p.4

This is in keeping with current scholarship that suggests Jesus' strategy for sharing the Good News was by encouraging his missionaries to befriend homeowners – and establish house churches.

In this story of the supper at Emmaus,
two travelers arrive at their accommodations
and take in a stranger at the end of the day,
who is given the honor of leading the table fellowship.

This story has been the subject of many artists' work over the centuries and I have my particular favorite on display in the Narthex which is "The Supper at Emmaus" by L'Hermitte.

It portrays the disciples at the moment of realizing the Risen Christ is in their midst.

There are two other characters in the painting that are not mentioned in the Bible story – a mother and her son who are setting the table, unaware of the dramatic event taking place.

Who best to represent the 'ministry of hospitality' necessary for this encounter with Christ to take place?

Isn't it a mother going about the daily chore of preparing a meal with help from her child that serves as an icon for what holds a household together.

I bring this to your attention this Mothers' Day as a way of recognizing the role of women that is often between the lines in our Biblical and liturgical tradition.

As we expand on what it means to be open and affirming, we will do a better job in noticing the importance of those who often are at work in the margins – like Mothers.

So, let's take a lesson from today's snapshot of the early church's formation and consider how we might be more open to welcome others – even into our homes.

Chris Farlekas' example is one formed over the years of putting an ideal into practice.

A simple beginning is to simply set up a guest room or at least plan to make a couch into an extra bed.

The occasion for this could be when family comes to visit, but could also be in the event of crisis – like a storm, which we know can happen here in Florida.

It could also be a way we welcome visitors who come to our church as workshop leaders or participants for events that we host.

Willard, p.5

Making room in one's house for others first requires
making room for others in your heart.

Jesus said,

“Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests,
but the Son of Man, the True Heir of Humanity,
has no place to rest.”

That's true except for the mercy received by the grace of those
who practice the 'ministry of hospitality'.

Amen

Our first lesson today comes from the Christian Testament letter of I Peter 1:10-16, 22-25 and is a call for Christians to practice 'holiness', not as a form of status, but as a demonstration of loving-kindness to one another.

10 Concerning this salvation,
the prophets who prophesied of the grace
that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry,
11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ
within them indicated, when it testified in advance
to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory.

12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you,
in regard to the things that have now been announced to you
through those who brought you good news
by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—
things into which angels long to look!

13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves;
set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you
when he is revealed.

14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires
that you formerly had in ignorance.

15 Instead, as he who called you is holy,
be holy yourselves in all your conduct;
16 for it is written,
'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth
so that you have genuine mutual love,
love one another deeply from the heart.

23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed,
through the living and enduring word of God.

24 For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers, and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord endures for ever.'

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Inspired by Luke 24:13-33a

LATER THAT DAY,

TWO OF THE MEN WERE WALKING

TO A VILLAGE NAMED EMMAUS,

ABOUT SEVEN MILES FROM JERUSALEM;

AND THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT
ALL THESE TERRIBLE AND WONDERFUL THINGS
THAT HAD HAPPENED.

AS THEY WERE TALKING AND WALKING TOGETHER,

JESUS, HIMSELF, DREW NEAR AND WENT WITH THEM;

AND HE ASKED THEM,

“WHAT IS THIS CONVERSATION YOU ARE
HAVING WITH EACH OTHER AS YOU WALK?”

THEY STOPPED RIGHT WHERE THEY WERE

AND THEY REALLY LOOKED SAD.

ONE OF THEM NAMED CLEOPAS SAID TO HIM,

“ARE YOU THE ONLY VISITOR TO JERUSALEM
WHO DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THE THINGS
THAT HAVE HAPPENED THERE
IN THE PAST FEW DAYS?”

HE SAID TO THEM,

“WHAT THINGS?”

THEY SAID TO HIM,

“CONCERNING JESUS OF NAZARETH,
A PROPHET MIGHTY IN WORD & DEED
BEFORE GOD & ALL THE PEOPLE
WHO WAS HANDED OVER BY
OUR CHIEF PRIESTS & RELIGIOUS EXPERTS
THOUGH WE HAD HOPED THAT HE WAS THE ONE
WHO WOULD RESCUE ISRAEL.”

“YES, AND BESIDES ALL THIS,

IT IS NOW THE THIRD DAY SINCE THAT HAPPENED;
AND SOME OF THE WOMEN OF OUR COMMUNITY
WENT TO HIS TOMB AND CAME BACK,
SAYING THEY HAD SEEN ANGELS
WHO SAID THAT HE WAS ALIVE!”

“SOME OF THE MEN WHO WERE WITH US

WENT TO THE TOMB AND FOUND IT JUST AS THE WOMEN HAD SAID,
BUT HE WAS NOT THERE...”

AND ‘HE’ SAID TO THEM,

“OH, MEN OF LITTLE FAITH WITH HEARTS SLOW TO BELIEVE
ALL THAT THE ‘PROPHETS’ HAVE TOLD YOU!

WAS IT NOT NECESSARY FOR THE MESSIAH TO SUFFER
AND THEN, ENTER INTO GLORY?”

AND HE BEGAN TO INTERPRET FOR THEM

ALL THE THINGS IN SCRIPTURE PERTAINING TO...
HIMSELF.

AS THEY DREW NEAR TO THE PLACE TO WHICH THEY WERE GOING,
HE SEEMED TO BE GOING FURTHER.

THEY DELAYED HIM, SAYING,
“OH, STAY WITH US, BECAUSE...”
“IT IS TOWARDS EVENING!”
“AND THE DAY IS ALMOST OVER!”
SO HE WENT IN TO STAY WITH THEM.

WHEN THEY WERE SEATED FOR DINNER,
THIS STRANGER TOOK THE BREAD,
BLESSED IT, BROKE IT AND GAVE IT TO THEM...
AND THEY RECOGNIZED HIM –
JUST AS HE VANISHED OUT OF THEIR SIGHT!

AND THEY SAID,
“DIDN’T OUR HEARTS BURN WITHIN US
WHEN HE TALKED TO US ON THE ROAD?”
“WHEN HE OPENED TO US
THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES!”

AND THEY RACED BACK FROM THERE
TO JERUSALEM IN AN HOUR...

Luke 24:13-33a

[13] That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

[14] and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

[16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

[17] And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

[18] Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

[19] And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

[20] and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

[21] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.

[22] Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning

[23] and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

[24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

[25] And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

[26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

[27] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[28] So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further,

[29] but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.

[30] When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.

[31] And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.

[32] They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

[33] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem;

The Roman Catholic Church responded to the news of bin Laden's death with this statement: "Faced with the death of a man, a Christian never rejoices, but reflects on the serious responsibility of everyone before God and man, and hopes and pledges that every event is not an opportunity for a further growth of hatred, but of peace."

[Christine Korsgaard, a philosophy professor at Harvard University says it is important,] "not to confuse the desire for retribution with the desire to defeat an enemy. But because terrorism partakes of both crime and war, it is perfectly natural, and perhaps legitimate, to have both of these attitudes towards Osama bin Laden: to think that we had to disable him, and to think that he deserved to die." The two sentiments should be kept apart, she says. "If we have any feeling of victory or triumph in the case, it should be because we have succeeded in disabling him — not because he is dead."

<http://www.npr.org/2011/05/03/135927693/is-it-wrong-to-celebrate-bin-ladens-death&sc=nl&cc=es-20110508>