# A Matter of the Heart; Hospitality

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Date: 05 July 2020

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[0:00] Now, it would be really helpful if you would grab a Bible, if you have one nearby, and turn to Romans 12, 9 through 20.

And as you're turning there, I want to welcome those of you who may be new to our church or just tuning in, joining us recently. Our topic today, as you've heard, is very, very significant.
Um, that word hospitality in verse 13 is the very opposite of the word xenophobia, which is so much in the news today.
That fear of strangers, outsiders that leads to racism, that leads to all kinds of ways of treating one another badly. The very opposite of that is the word hospitality, which in the original language is a lot of phila xenion, the love of strangers.
It is something that brings healing to racism. It brings a fullness and a comfort and company to loneliness. It can even heal hatred of our enemies.
[1:14] So this is a powerful, powerful topic that we are talking about, hospitality. And as you can see in verse 12, in verse 9 of chapter 12, it is all about love, hospitality is.

That's why it says at the beginning, let love be sincere. And in the original language, it's actually saying, let love be unhypocritical.
It means don't just say, I love my neighbor. It's saying, do something about it. And then the rest of these verses that we read today tell about how we can love unhypocritically.
Mostly it has to do about hospitality. The loving welcome that you give to people both inside the church and outside the church as well, even to your enemies.
It is very down to earth. This is a very practical part of the Bible, but it is also deeply significant. It is life changing.
[2:16] It is radical. It is heart changing as well. There are risks in acting on these words. But if you do it, you find yourself deeply blessed.

And so I want to look at this passage in four ways. There's four things that this passage says about hospitality that I want to share with you today. First, hospitality reflects the good news of Jesus. Secondly, hospitality is at the heart of the Christian life. And third, hospitality makes us other focused. And finally, fourthly, hospitality is a big door into God's grace.
So let's look at the first one. It reflects the good news of Jesus. That hospitable love we are called to in verse 9 and 10 is deeply rooted in God's love for us.
So it says real love abhors what is evil, which means it is repelled against anything that pulls us away from God and His intentions for us, anything that tears down people that He has created.
[3:31] And instead, love holds fast to what is good. Now, when my boys were young, they would sometimes grab hold of my leg and see if I could get away from them.

And so what they would do, usually I was unsuccessful. And what they would do is they would grab hold really tightly. I would twist and turn, but their grip was so tenacious I could not get away.
So I would pull them across the length of our hardwood floor or the length of the whole house, pulling and pulling. It was a great workout. It was like a living weight that you're pulling. And I couldn't get away.
This is a picture of what it means to hold fast to what is good. Literally, it means being glued to what is good. And this wonderful book of Romans says that the greatest good that we hold on to is the goodness of God's mercy, the goodness of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.
And that's been laid out for us in the first 11 chapters of this book. And if you want to summarize that love and the mercy that we are to be glued to and hold fast to, it is the word adoption.
[4:51] Romans 8.15 tells us this. It says, And some of you watching today have been adopted as children.

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And some of you have adopted children yourselves. It is a great gift to be brought into a family that loves you and who chooses to bring you into the life of their family permanently.
In the most complete way, the adopted person is immersed into the life of their new family. And in the same way, God adopts you.
Everything that separates you from God is removed by the forgiveness of your sins. And you become immersed in God's life. The life of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You are enfolded into His love. By God's adoption, you belong to Jesus forever. And you have a new name.
[6:12] You are daughter of God. You are son of God. You belong to Him forever. And His nature, God's nature, is never to leave you or forsake you.

And baptism is the sign of that new life together. Now, Romans says Jesus died in our place on a cross to make this possible.
He takes our sins upon Himself. And He gives to you and to me this right relationship with God as our Heavenly Father who loves us dearly.
And that powerful forever adoption is the ultimate of hospitality. Because it is about being brought into God's family. And if you put your trust in Jesus, that is your new identity.
I am one who belongs to God. I am His son. I am His daughter. And this is true even if you are new with us today. And you've just entrusted yourself to Jesus today.
[7:19] This is good news. It is all about hospitality. The gracious bringing of each of us into this life of God. Hold fast to this truth.

And this brings us to the second point. Hospitality is at the heart of the Christian life. Now, this makes sense, doesn't it? If you have received tremendous love.
If you've been welcomed into the eternal family. Hospitality must shape who you are. It is why verse 10 teaches us to love one another with brotherly affection and outdo one another in showing honor.
We have the greatest motivation to do this. There's two parts of our hospitality that we are taught in the Bible. And the first might be somewhat surprising.
Jesus calls us first of all to be hospitable to Him. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He did not have a place to live. The Gospels all tell us this.
[8:24] Jesus said to His disciples, Foxes have holes and birds of the airs have nests. But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. And so what He did was to accept the hospitality of His friends, of strangers, of those who received grace upon grace from Him as well.

I don't know if you remember the story of Zacchaeus, but the first thing Jesus said to Zacchaeus, who was far away from God, and who was up in a tree, was, Come down, Zacchaeus, and invite me to your house.
Zacchaeus did. And Jesus says, Today salvation has come to this home. That is the pattern of God saving you.
When Jesus calls you to a right response, it is the response of welcoming Him. In Revelation chapter 3, 20, Jesus speaks to people of all time.
And He says these incredible words. He says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into Him and eat with Him and He with Me.
[9:38] If you are hearing Jesus' voice today, He is calling you to open the door of your heart to Him. Today may be the first day you open the door of your life to Him.

If it is, it would be a great joy to hear from you. Let us know it's the most important day of your life. It is a day in which you have welcomed Him into the home of your life because He has welcomed you first.
And for those of you who have been Christian for maybe all of your life, every day God calls us to renew our welcome of Jesus into the home of our mind, of our soul, of our heart.
Welcome Him. The second aspect of hospitality flows from this. It is to welcome people into our lives as well. The people who are in our lives.
People that God brings to us. And this is the radical aspect to this Christian hospitality. In these verses, we are being taught very clearly to show hospitality to people within the church, hospitality to those outside the church, and even to the extent of blessing and caring from your enemies.
[10:55] We see that through this whole passage. And this challenges us because we like our comfort. We surround ourselves with people that we easily relate to.

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It feels safe. So we actually need Jesus at home in us to live this out, to take the risk of hospitality. We need His grace, and we need His Holy Spirit to strengthen us and to lead us.
And that's because, as Ruth and Jack said, Christian hospitality is different from entertaining. Entertaining is about impressing other people.
But hospitality is loving people without expectation of receiving in return. The nature of that loving is to very simply welcome people into your life.
And this can be done in very simple ways. We are doing it because God has brought you in to share His life. It is really a generous action of the heart.
[12:03] It is opening ourselves up to those who we may not have known before. And Christian hospitality is much more than a handshake, which is very good in this time of COVID.

It's much more than saying hello or the welcome that you're here at church. It is about bringing that other person into your life and hearing of their life.
You know, how can you rejoice with those who are rejoicing and weep with those who weep, as we hear in this passage, unless you actually know that person?
People come to our church hungry for friendship. Friendship with God, but also friendship with other people. And this is what children in Sunday school are looking for.
This is what the youth who come to youth group in the services each Sunday, this is what they're looking for. This is what single people are looking for in our church and outside of it.
[13:03] It is what people young and old desperately want. It's what married people and family people want. We are looking for friendship, but it can only happen through hospitality.

We live in a city where there is an epidemic. And it's an epidemic that is much more widespread than COVID. And that is the virus of loneliness.
When immigrants or refugees come to Canada, one of the shocks that they experience is that they may be in an apartment building with lots of people or in a neighborhood with many that live there, but no one knows their neighbors.
Everyone lives separate lives. And it is actually a lonely existence. There is a famine of hospitality in this culture that we live in in Vancouver.
And that's why this passage is so challenging. It is why it is so encouraging as well. We have, you and I, in these verses, the antidote to this sickness of loneliness.
[14:11] We have the good news of Jesus' hospitality to us. And our great privilege and calling is to be welcomers into that life that we share together.

It is to bring people into our lives and the family of God. And so what verse 13 does for us, if you look for us, look at this, is to give to us a vision for our life, a vision for the relationships that we have.
It says, as we've just read before, seek to show hospitality. And the original language is actually much stronger than this. It says, pursue hospitality.
Make it your life aim. We are meant to strive after it. It's what our relationships should be all geared towards. We are meant to strive after it. It's not an optional extra for those who are extroverted or those who have lots of extra time.
It's actually part of our worship as this chapter 12 began. We are to serve God in our own unique ways and in those ways to welcome people who are different from us, who are new to us, and to make that a central part of our life.
[15:30] And as we do that, opportunities come to speak of God's grace as well. And this is the greatest gift that we can give a person. Now, if you are like me, this does not always come easily to you or to me.

There is something that has to happen inside. We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And one way that God renews our minds is to change us from being self-serving to being self-giving.
God's Word does that for us. And God's Word calls us to act on it in this hospitality. And that's why the third thing that we hear out of this passage is that hospitality makes us other-focused.
This is what the renewing of our mind does. It changes the way that we act and the way we think. When we seriously consider the urgent call to hospitality, God turns our minds and hearts more and more towards others.
And in His power, He is bringing and using COVID to show us areas in our lives to work on, ways that we can grow and live out this outward living life.

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[16:47] We have time for just a couple of ways that God is doing this. And I want to share them now. First, COVID shows that most of us have over-scheduled lives that need to be adjusted to allow hospitality.

You know, raise your hand if that is true for you. Well, I was at a little gathering for grads and their parents, and I asked one of the parents, you know, has it been tough for you working at home with your kids there?
And he answered, actually, there's some very good things that have happened through the last 100 days. And I sat up and noticed, and he said to me, he said, because of COVID, all of the kids in my townhouse complex are at home.
There's no tutors. There's no after-school curriculum and care. They are not in anything right now. And so they are around. Nothing to do.
And the kids in that complex all ended up meeting each other. He said, and they're riding bikes all day. They're playing together all day. I had no idea we had children in our townhouse complex.
[17:58] And he said, not only that, but I got to know their parents too, who are home from work. Most of them I've never met before in the many years I lived there. So he said, there is actually a good side to this awful pandemic of COVID because of it.

And I think this is very revealing for us. It shows us how incredibly powerful our schedules are in shaping our ability to be hospitable and to know other people.
There is really no way that we can invite people into our lives if we don't make room for them. God calls us in this Bible reading to be very intentional about hospitality, to make it our aim to pursue hospitality.
And it is key for us that we will need to shift our schedules. And thankfully, God is patient with us. He renews us in this area, beginning with one person and in small steps.
God asks us and causes and pushes us to ask these practical questions. How can I open my life to other people? And as Jack mentioned to us, some really practical ways, they can be phone calls.
[19:15] They can very simply be conversations that you have with people. It can be asking for prayer needs and following them up. It can be noticing physical needs that you can meet, as the beginning of verse 13 tells us.

There are creative ways that God calls us to reach out to those who are around us. But notice that the practical ideas involve always a generosity of spirit.
One of the things that so encourages me is to see that people in our church are doing incredibly practical and marvelous creative things in this pandemic time.
They are practicing it. And I think one of the things that's important for us is to talk to people you know in the church. How are you being hospitable in a time when there seems to be so many barriers to it?
It is an encouragement to be part of a community where you see people taking this call to hospitality seriously. We are moved and encouraged to act in this way.
[20:20] And then secondly, there's another thing that God reveals us through COVID, and that is that we all have this tendency towards self-focus.

I think the crisis shows us that our fears for ourselves and our family can very easily take over. It crowds out the needs of people around us.
We want to take care of ourselves first. And what hospitality does is to take ourselves out of this. It makes us take risks and makes us sacrifice for the needs of others.
It makes us outward focused, frees us to this work. And I think in some ways, COVID has been a great training ground for that. Our government has helped with this message to be very concerned for those who are around us.
So as we now more and more gather again, God is preparing us to be other-focused. He is using awful things in our life to ask ourselves these questions.
[21:29] You know, are the Christian gatherings the place where you go to get your needs met? Or is it an opportunity to be about the central calling of hospitality?

The church is the one place where people very different from ourselves actually get to know one another and become the family that loves God together.
And I want to say, when you think of those outside the church, there has been no easier time in our history to invite people to church than now. All you have to do is say, come to our online service.

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There is very low risk for them and for you as well. Hospitality makes us outward-focused, and God is working on this in our life right now.
And then finally, I want to close this sermon by encouraging you, because the fourth thing I want to say is that hospitality is a big door to God's grace.
[22:28] Because it is by God's grace and His hospitality, the sacrifice of giving yourselves to others, that you will experience the blessing of God.

Not only do you give grace and hospitality, but you will receive it as well. Everyone I talk to who practices hospitality that this passage calls us to experiences tremendous blessing.
I was talking to one person this week who was sharing about her own story of hospitality and God moving her out of herself towards others in her life.
She was very convicted one Sunday, at one Sunday service, that she was looking past someone in the congregation, somebody who was new to Canada, who she had never met before, and she had seen her from Sunday to Sunday.
And so the next Sunday, she asked that woman to tea. It has turned into a beautiful friendship. And I want to read, I asked her to write down her little testimony.
[23:37] I want to read it to you. She said, what began with a powerful conviction of sin has ended up being one of the greatest blessings of my life.

This woman and other new Canadians I have met through her are now among my closest friends. Spending time with them is a joy and privilege. It's not just a Christian responsibility or a way of serving God.
They love and care for me in wonderful, relational, and practical ways. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. You can't describe the blessing of giving hospitality better than that.
It is not something that is burdensome. It is an expression of God's grace that goes both ways to the person that you are caring for and receiving it in that relationship.
It's not a burdensome call that God is giving to us today. He is patient with us. We start small with one person in our life that God brings to us.
[24:50] And we pray for them. We choose to pray for them. Verse 12 teaches us to be constant in prayer because we need God's help and His grace in this sacrificial work of hospitality.

It is sacrifice to open our lives to one another. It's risky. But God's mercy and His grace makes it to be a joyful sacrifice. There was real joy in Jack and Ruth's voice as they talked about their experience of hospitality.
And the power and sovereignty of God, the mercy and love of His hospitality to us means that His welcoming love and not COVID has the last word.
God in His grace gives us creative ways by His grace to love others sincerely. He gives us strength to be zealous to love and fervent to serve Him.
Is this your vision this morning? We serve a God who strengthens us to do what He calls us to.
COVID is a hard time of separation as Ruth mentioned in that interview.
[26:00] But by God's grace it is also a time that you and I get to turn to God and to ask that great hospitable question that Ruth asked in the interview.

And that question is Lord, what would you have me do? What would you have me do? Amen. Amen.

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