The Hospitality of God

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Preacher: Ben Short

[0:00] Hello. My name's Ben. I'm going to begin by praying for us.

Father, we thank you for these two stories. I ask that you help us to understand them tonight. I ask that they will speak to us. Lord, open our eyes to see who you are. Amen.
Well, thank you, Joe, for reading two big and wonderful stories for us tonight. Thank you. Well, we're starting a new series at St. John's tonight that will go for the rest of the summer.
And we are starting a series on the subject of hospitality. We are going to ask the question, what does it mean to be hospitable as a Christian?
Why should we be hospitable? I hope that there's two goals that we'll go through together in this series for the rest of the summer. The first goal is that as we think about the subject together, that you will be encouraged to engage in hospitality.
[1:24] As a church, one of the calls to us is to be hospitable, to act together in a hospitable way, and to act personally in our own individual lives hospitably.

We hope that the result of six weeks is that we will be challenged to be more hospitable. And I'll just continue the plug. This book that Lynn is leading a series through is going to think about hospitality. And I would encourage you to think about signing up for her book study. Our second goal is to look at the hospitality of God.
And to wonder at what he has done for us. And what he continues to do for us. And these two goals, to make us more hospitable, and to look at the hospitality of God, are connected.
I would like you to open your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 10. Because Deuteronomy chapter 10 connects these two things for us. And you can find that on page 154.
[2:33] You may have heard before, maybe not, that the word in Greek for hospitality is the word philozeno. It's the two words for love and stranger.

So hospitality means love for a stranger. Now this word is never in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is in Hebrew, not Greek.
But the idea is there. Let's look at chapter 10 of Deuteronomy. And I'm going to read two verses. Verse 18 and verse 19. And I want this to be the theme verses for the series for the next six weeks of hospitality.
Verse 18. God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow. And he loves the sojourner or the stranger, giving him food and clothing.
Love the stranger, therefore. For you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Verse 18 says that God loves the stranger.
[3:41] God is hospitable. God is hospitable. And verse 19 says we should be hospitable too. And these are connected. So tonight, I have the privilege of looking at the first of those verses.

The hospitality of God. I'm not going to talk so much about us, what we do. That's for further weeks. I'm going to look at who God is and what he's like. And my goal is that tonight our hearts will melt as we look at God who is hospitable.
And I'm going to look at the two pictures, the two scenes that we read about tonight. These two stories are going to show us who God is, or at least something of who God is.
May these pictures fill our minds tonight. The first picture is the threat to hospitality. Why don't we open up to Genesis chapter 3 again.
And this story is the low points of human existence, really. Right near the beginning. It's where people say no to God.
[4:53] It's the first act of insincerity, of deception and hate. And the picture is this. Adam is hiding behind a bush, shivering.

That's the picture. Adam is there, afraid, ashamed, broken.

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Chapter 3, verse 8. I need to find out there. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day.
And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. It's awful.
They have sinned. They have done the one thing that God asked them not to do. God gave them one command. Not to eat of the fruit of the tree.
[6:02] Of the knowledge of good and evil. And they did it. They went against his one ask. They disobeyed him. And in that act, they chose to decide for themselves.

That they would be king and queen of their own lives. And not choose that God would be king of their lives. They chose to rule in place of God. And they brought shame on themselves.
It is not a triumphant rule. It is a fearful one. Verse 10. They said to God. He said to God. I heard the sound of you in the garden.
And I was afraid. The contrast is hurtful. Before Adam walked with God in the garden. And now he hears his sound and he's afraid.
Because I was naked and I hid myself. Before he celebrated what God had made him to be. And now he's naked and ashamed.
[7:04] Adam and Eve rejected the hospitality of God. There is a teaching in this passage. And the teaching is that there is an ugly truth.

That lies inside every human heart. There is a deep set selfishness. Inside all of us.
We want to choose. To be the king and queen of our own lives. This temptation to reject God and choose selfishness.
We have a name for it. The name is sin. And we are the children of Adam. And the daughters of Eve. Now. We have a problem with hospitality.
In the city of Vancouver. Vancouver. I'm sure most of us have thought this at least once. If you've been here for more than a week. People feel lonely.
[8:02] It's a widely felt thing. That this is an inhospitable place I guess. There's a group called the Vancouver Foundation.

Maybe you know about this. They're a group that seeks to do good in Vancouver. And they manage money in charitable ways. And they're seeking to be strategic about this.
And. They made a report. A couple years ago. And it's often cited in sermons. But. I'm actually going to read you from the report. So this is a group of people.
Seeking to be strategic. And. You can get the report online. I would even suggest you do it. It's an easy read. I'm going to read some of the highlights.
This is what they say. In 2011. We polled. 275 charitable organizations. We also talked to over 100 community leaders.
[8:57] Across Metro Vancouver. What they told us. Was a surprise. We expected people would choose. Poverty. Or homelessness. Or any of the social ills.

That dominate the headlines. To be the biggest problem. They did talk about these things. But none of them emerged. As the most important. What people said concerned them the most.
Was a growing sense of isolation. And disconnection. They said. We live increasingly in silos. Separated by ethnicity. Culture.
Language. Income. Age. And even geography. They lamented. What they saw. As a deepening civic malaise. That has resulted. In people.
Threatening. Sort of retreating. From community activities. They said. This corrosion of caring. And social isolation. Hurts them personally. And hurts their community. They have a list.
[9:53] Of characteristics. That they point to. They say. Metro Vancouver. Can be a hard place. To make friends. They say. Our neighborhood connections.

Are cordial. But weak. The most often cited. Reason for not knowing. Neighbors. Is that people. Seldom see each other. Many people.
In Metro Vancouver. Are retreating. From community life. And. They talk about. This is. Five years ago. The affordability. Issue. In Metro Vancouver.
Is affecting people's. Attitudes. And beliefs. That's amazing. That was five years ago. How much more. Is it affecting. Our attitudes. And beliefs today. We live in a beautiful place.
This is a wonderful city. It's so wonderful. But our largeness. And our busyness. Our striving. Is creating something. That's not good.

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[10:50] We were made. For relationships. And friendships. And community. And I would add. To this list. This is an increasingly. Secular city. There's less.

And less room. For God. In Vancouver. And we are failing. To be hospitable. To people. And to God. In Vancouver. It's wrong.
There's something. Not wrong. Happening. I think we feel it. I'm not the only one. Who feels like this. But. I need to make a link.
Between Genesis 3. And the Vancouver. Foundation report. Because they're connected. They're connected. They're really connected. Right? There are problems.
There are problems. With how things are structured. Totally. There are problems. Out there. But the deepest problem. Is the selfishness. That lies in our hearts. That's the deepest problem.
[11:49] As true as the report is. Vancouver is reaping the fruit. Of our sins. Of our own sins. And I think the first response. For us to hear that report.

Is to repent. It's because we reject God. In our hearts. I want to bring a Christian understanding. To the Vancouver Foundation. Now.
This story. This story. Is a bleak story. It's a sad story. Adam shivering behind a bush. But it's not just a bleak story. Because even in this picture.
While Adam is shivering. God walks in. And he calls Adam. And he pursues Adam. Adam. It's amazing. Verse 9.
The Lord God called to him. And he said. Where are you? God goes after Adam. Even though he's like that.
[12:46] It's amazing. And I think this is one of the keys. To hospitality actually. God pursues Adam. And one of the hearts. We need to cultivate in ourselves.

Is a heart to seek people. This is hard in Vancouver. It is. And I think we have an opportunity here. Let's think about. How we can go about.
Welcoming people into our lives. So the question is. Who this week can I pursue? Who can we go after? Okay. So.
Before I move to the second picture. So our first picture is. Adam. Shivering behind a bush. Before we go to the second one. Which is. Which is. A great. Happy.
Good picture. Right. Before we go on. I want to make a little definition. About hospitality. So we're talking about this idea. What is hospitality? Hospitality is welcoming someone.
[13:43] Into your world. Hospitality is love for the stranger. It's bringing a person. Out there. Into my life. Into the space.

Into the time. Into the resources that I have. Eating with someone in your home. Is a wonderful expression of hospitality. I was talking to a pastor.
From a Chinese church. A while back. And he told me. That the dim sum. Has a meaning. So. Dim sum is a meal. That. Comes from traditional Chinese culture.
And apparently. It means. A single touch. Of the heart. So. The idea is. I'm here. I'm sitting down. And there's dim sum there. And the other person. Sitting and eating. And when I put my hand. Into the middle. Where. Our hearts are touching. As we both grab.
[14:37] The same piece of food. I think. A really beautiful picture. I think. You know. Like. As we eat together. We're sharing something. More than just the food. I think. Hospitality.

Has very little acts. Has small acts. Like. When I go. To. The grocery shop. I can. Smile. At the person. Who's. Giving. You know.
Taking. My food. Through. That hospitality. Has humongous acts. Like welcoming. An orphan. Into your home. As your own child. Hospitality. Is a posture.
Of welcoming. Hospitality. Is about. How you treat people. How we use. Our resources. And we come. To the second scene. Here is the parable.
Of the prodigal son. And this is a picture. Of tender love. And care. And beauty. And it is a. Contrast. To Genesis 3. It is a picture.
[15:30] Of welcome. And it is a picture. Of hospitality. Let's turn. To Luke chapter 15. Jesus tells the story.

And I think. It's at least. One of the most. Known bits. Of the new. The bible. I think. And. I'm going to go. Straight.
To the most. Important verse. I think. The most important. Verse. Is verse 20. The father. Sees. The son.

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He arose. Sorry. The son arose. And came to the father. But while. The son was still. Long way off. The father. Saw him. And felt compassion.
And ran. And embraced him. And kissed him. What a picture. The words. Literally mean. He fell. [16:29] Onto his neck. And he envelops. The son. And he kisses him. On the head. It is so wonderful. It's this extravagant.

Picture. It's emotional. The father. It's a picture. Of a father. Who loves his son. There is a love. Stronger than death.
At work here. And the point. Of this story. Is this is the heart. Of God. To welcome. With open arms. This selfish.
Son. This broken son. To weep. With joy. To throw. His hands. Around his neck. To embrace him. When the son.
Comes back. He's concerned. With his sin. Look at verse. 18 and 19. The son says. I will arise. And go to my father. And I will say to him. Father.
[17:22] I have sinned. Against heaven. And against you. I am no longer. Worthy. To be called your son. Treat me. As one. Of your hired servants. The son goes.

Bringing his shame. To God. To the father. The father. Is not. Concerned. With this sin. At least. It's not his number one concern. He's concerned.
To love his son. To throw his arms. Around his neck. And to kiss him. On the head. That's what concerns. The father. The son.
Has brought shame. On himself. I think this is an element. Of the story. That. In Canadian culture. At least. We'll miss. This was written. In a shame. Honor culture.
And. It's a really important. Aspect. Of how. Lots of cultures. Have operated. And still operate. Today. The son. Has changed.
[18:17] His status. From honor status. To shame status. By doing. What he's done. He's become. A shameful person. And when a shameful person. Comes back to the city.

There would be a gathering. And people would. The word is to shame. I actually saw this. When I was in Malawi. A couple of years back.
I was walking through a market. Once. With some friends. And there was a very loud ruckus. Over there. And people were standing. And yelling.
And doing something. I wasn't sure what was happening. And I asked. The guy I was with. What's going on? Something. Eighty people. Kind of yelling.
And freaking out. And. And. The guy told me. He's like. Oh. There's a guy. It looks like he's stolen something. Maybe like a goat. Or a cow.
[19:12] Like he stole someone's goat. And he's being caught. And he's being shamed. So what they do is. They. They. They get together. And. He has to walk in front of the group.

And they hold palm leaves. And. They do this thing with. It's really. Wild really. And they. They shame him. Right. Because. He has a shame status now. And that's exactly the sort of welcome. The son would get. Coming back. He's. He's a shamed son. Right. And what the father does. Is he covers the shame. That's. That's why. He does this robe stuff.
So verse. Verse 22. The father says. To his servants. Bring quickly the best robe. And put it on him. And put a ring on his hand. And shoes on his feet.
So the deal with the shoes. Is servants don't wear shoes. Only. Only the master wears shoes. Right. Servants take shoes off of other people.
[20:06] The shoes is a status thing. And by putting shoes on his feet. And a robe on his back. And a ring on his finger. The father is covering the shame.

It's really amazing. And the father. Would actually be. Taking the shame on himself.
Because people in a village like this. Might look at the father differently for this. They would say. Your son did what? And you let him get away with it? So he's the kind of father.
Who lets that happen. And the answer is yes. He is a father. Who would let his son get away with that. This is a story about what God is like.
God throws sinners a party. He covers the sin of wicked people. With purple robes. And sandals. And I want to connect these two pictures.
[21:04] Right. This picture of Adam shivering. Ashamed. And the father throwing his arms. And kissing the son on the head. Right. The father.

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Our God is the one who is unselfish. In the face of the selfishness of humans. What a wonderful God we have. Now.
I'm going to put this picture. The picture of a father kissing his son. Into two contexts. Two. Two wider contexts. Because we've got to do this. This story. This has to.
It's bigger than just the story. And the first context. Is the context of Jesus life. Jesus told the story for a reason. The story has an edge.
If you read through Luke. You'll see it. In his life. People are upset. By Jesus hospitality. His radical hospitality. Right. He ruffled feathers.
[22:00] He upset people. By welcoming prostitutes. He upset people. By welcoming tax collectors. And this story. Is his defense.

It's his self-justification. Jesus ate with sinners. Matthew the tax collector. Jesus spoke with the bleeding woman.
And the Samaritan woman. And he restored them. Jesus went to meet. The ten lepers. He just crossed lines. He broke the cultural barriers.
And people. Didn't like it. In all of these stories. Jesus is doing. Exactly what the father. In this story does.
Jesus is throwing his arms. Around people. And he's kissing them. And he's covering them. In a purple robe. And he's putting sandals. On their feet. Jesus did that. With his whole life.
[22:59] Especially. Because Jesus is the one. Who covers our shame. Whereas we reject God. And his hospitality. Whereas we fail hospitality.

And act like shameful sons. Jesus accepts shame. That we deserve. The cross. One of the things. We need to think about. The cross of Jesus Christ. Is he receives shame.
That we deserve. And he takes it away. Like the father. He covers the shame. So this story. Kind of expands out. We see the whole life.
Of Jesus in the story. But it keeps going. It expands. To our world. We need to take the story. And put it over. The Vancouver isolation thing.
And the whole thing. That's happening in the world. Because this is a deep truth. That underlies. The fabric of existence. There is something greater.
[23:54] Than the selfishness of humans. There is something greater. Than the loneliness of Vancouver. And that is the welcome of God. This means at least two things.

This means that no one is beyond. The hospitality of God. God's hospitality is open to all people. It's very common for us to say.
Not with our words. But in our hearts. You know. These are the people who are in. But those people out there. I'm just not sure. And people draw those lines differently.
To each other. But God's hospitality is so large. It makes us uncomfortable. Adam ate the fruit. That's when God called him.
The son walked away. And that's when the father welcomed him. There is no one. Who is further. Than God's love. There is no one.
[24:54] Who is outside. Of what God can do. I have a picture. Hey Noah. Is there a picture ready? Here's a funny looking guy.

I did a paper. A little while back. A couple weeks ago. On something called. The Jesus people movement. It's just kind of illustration. Um.
He kind of looks like Jesus. Hey. He knows it too. Uh. In. In the 1960s. The hippies happened. Um. And.
Uh. For most of us here. That's kind of. Oh that's nice. If there are any people who are. A little bit wiser. And. Wizened. They. They might understand.
A little bit more about. Like kind of what the hippies meant. Uh. Because. They were in. A real way. Sort of outcasts. Right. Like. They. They. Chose to remove themselves.
[25:51] From mainstream society. And they rejected mainstream society. And most people. Really didn't like the hippies very much. And. This thing happened. Where. A whole bunch of hippies.

Became Christians. Like. Um. Like. Maybe about a million. All over the states. A lot of them. Um. All over the place. They're becoming Christians. And this dude.
Was one of their spokes. Guys. His name is Lonnie. Frisbee. I. I didn't make that up. Um. Seriously. He was born with that name. Before there were any hippies. Um.

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Maybe. The name. Made him who he was. And. Here he's appearing on a TV show. Uh. And. I'm going to read a little bit. About what he says. He says. Well. The people tell me.
That I'm trying to look like Jesus. I can't have thinking of anyone else. That I'd rather look like. Jesus. He changed my life. And I kind of like. Relate it to the. David the psalmist. When he says. Thou hast lifted me up.
[26:47] From the dung hill. And he's placed my feet. On a solid rock. And he says. I'm a servant of God. And a child of God. And God is raising up. From the very bottom. And he's raising up the foolish.

And what the world considers dumb. And he's putting his spirit upon them. God is blowing everybody's mind. Because he's saving the hippies. And nobody thought a hippie could be saved. That's awesome right. Now. Today for us. It's. This isn't crossing a barrier for us today right. But it was. Back then. And many churches turn hippies away actually.
It's quite sad. Because. They had flaws. But God was there. The love of God is overwhelming. And it's so much greater than we can understand.
It's like a wild lion. And I just like us to imagine. What the hospitality of God. Could do. Here in the city of Vancouver.
[27:45] Vancouver. What could it look like. If that heart. That God has. For the sun. Was shared with Vancouver.

But. Let your imagination run wild with that picture. Right. God's love is so large. And. When we're hospitable. All we're doing is calling people.
Into something that God's done. We are so limited. But. So God's hospitality means. Anybody's welcome. All people are welcome. But it also means this. And this is my last point.
God's hospitality. Does not leave us. As we are. We come to God. With our questions. And our needs. And the things that we have. Who we are.
And he welcomes us. With open arms. But he often comes back to us. With his own questions. That we weren't ready for.
[28:43] In both these stories. There's a thing about clothes. Right. In Luke. The father gives the son. He comes with these dirty.

Pig clothes. And the father gives him. The beautiful new robe. In Genesis. Adam has made these fig leaves.
I don't know if you've tried. But fig leaves. Are very itchy. Apparently. It's a sign of desperation. That you would wear fig leaves. Really. They're like. God.
Makes. Animal skin. Clothes for them. And he. He puts something good on them. But God also bars them. From the tree of life. For their good.
You see. God is at. He's in the business of. Being hospitable. Which means. Welcoming us. But. Then. Moving us along.
[29:41] I was looking up. A C.S. Lewis quote. And I found a different one. Than the one I was looking for. But the one I found. Was really good. So I'll read to you. From C.S. Lewis.

This is from. Your Christianity. C.S. Lewis says. Imagine. Yourself. As. A living. House. God. Comes in. To rebuild. That house. At first.
Perhaps. You can understand. What he's doing. He is getting. The drains. Right. Stopping. The leaks. In the roof. And so on. You knew. That those jobs.
Needed doing. And so you were not surprised. But presently. He starts knocking. The house about. In a way that hurts. Abominably. That's so British. And does not seem.
To make any sense. What on earth. Is he up to? The explanation. Is that he is building. Quite. A different house. From the one. That you thought of. He's throwing up.
[30:36] A new wing. Here. And. Putting on. An extra floor. Over there. Running up towers. Making a courtyard. You thought. You were being made. Into a decent.

Little cottage. But. He. Is building. A palace. He intends. To come. And live. In it. Himself. Wow. He's good.
And he's right. He's right. God comes. And he changes us. And sometimes. He's got to. Knock that wall down. To put the new wing in.
But he's making us. Into the image of Jesus Christ. And it is so wonderful. We have a God. Whose heart. Is much bigger. Much wider.

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Much more full. Than you could ever imagine. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[31:30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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