

March 10, 2019
Genesis 18:1-8
Luke 14:7-14

Communion is about Hospitality

This ritual that we do called Communion is very important to us in the church. Christians of all kinds around the world gather at a Table just like this one. They take bread and wine, or grape juice, just like we do and they share it with one another and remember Jesus. Just like we do, they remember who they are. And they remember who God is. All of us gather at the Table and remember. Because this what Jesus told us to. Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, it becomes more than bread and juice. It becomes special. It becomes holy. It becomes something of God. It's no longer just about us, it's about something much bigger. At the Communion Table, we remember grace and mercy and love and freedom. We remember Jesus. During the next six weeks during Lent, we will be practicing communion every Sunday and thinking about it; what does it mean, what does it do, what does it help us remember. At this table, we will gather and Jesus will tell us: "This is my body. This is my blood. Do this and remember me."

At Communion, we gather for a meal. Though our meal is small, it used to be, long ago, that this was a meal. Christians gathered to eat together. And this ritualized part called the Lord's Supper has been important since the beginning of the church. But eating a meal together with others has always been important. And we find it is true all the way back in the book of Genesis. We see God is there when we share our best. When we offer hospitality and the welcome. That's what Communion is about. First of all, it's about hospitality. And hospitality means three things. Number one, we are ready to have company. Two, it means we make room for our company and three, it means we are gracious to whatever kind of company shows up.

Hospitality is a blessing and a gift. And we know how wonderful it is to be welcomed somewhere. We know how good it feels when someone makes an effort to make us comfortable and lets their home be our home. We also probably know what it's like to feel unwelcome, when no one takes the time to notice us or look us. I'm betting that all of us have had one of those bad experiences in a hotel, or a gas station, or a restaurant when the floors were sticky and the tables were dirty and the

staff rolled their eyes when we asked for more paper towels for the bathroom. We know bad hospitality. But we also know good hospitality. Good hospitality is something special. And it's what made Abraham righteous in the eyes of the Lord. Because Abraham was ready to offer hospitality. Number one, he was prepared to welcome others, to notice their needs, to have them sit down for a meal. And that included three strangers by the oaks of Mamre. Abraham saw them and invited them to his tent. And he did it without even knowing who they were. Because that's what you do with true hospitality. You notice someone is a stranger and you invite them in. In Abraham's culture, you had to be prepared to do that. Even now, in the Middle East, hospitality is very important. You start a conversation then you are offered tea and a seat and you are expected to stay a while. You can't stay just a minute, because they want to provide for you. They are the host. You are the guest. Their welcome is important. For the sake of their honor, for the sake of their family, for the sake of God, they want you to feel at home. Hospitality is important spiritually. In the Bible, hospitality is commanded by God, especially for strangers and foreigners. In Leviticus

19, God tells the people of Israel to provide for aliens and foreigners and treat them like citizens. “You shall love the alien as you love yourself” says God, because you were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” Be hospitable. Remember what it was like to be an outsider. Remember what it was like to be strangers in a strange land. Remember what it was like to be foreign and unwelcome.

Abraham must have remembered. He must have remembered what it was like to be a foreigner. Long before Egypt, he and his family had moved away from their hometown at God’s command. They had traveled all the way from Ur and settled in Canaan. And they struggled to fit in with their neighbors. One person welcomed him: King Melchizedek, he brought them bread and wine. And I think that made an impression on Abraham. Like the neighbor who brings over a loaf of banana bread. Or the neighbor who helps you with a flat tire. Abraham knew what it was like to be a stranger and have someone notice and care for you. He noticed the three men by the oak trees. And he runs to greet them. And he invites them to his tent. Notice the urgency. He runs.

Because Abraham was prepared to have company. He was ready to be a host when strangers appeared because he knew what it was like.

We need to be prepared for company. We need to be ready to be hosts.

When I expect to have guests, I want them to feel at home. I make an effort to clean up. I dust. I vacuum. I wipe fingerprints off of the fridge. I make sure there are clean towels and clean sheets. I have some drinks on hand. Maybe I cook up a special meal. I make sure there aren't a bunch of shoes piled up by the front door, and that there aren't big piles of laundry in the corner. I want my guests to know that in my life, there is room for them.

And that's the second part of hospitality. Making room for others.

Making space in our lives: physical space, mental space, spiritual space for the needs of others. Abraham made space for his three guests during the heat of the day. He had them come to his tent and sit in the shade of his tree. He had his servants bring water that they had brought from his well so they could wash up. He had his wife Sarah make a delicious meal for them. And whatever else he had planned that day, he set it aside

so he could entertain his guests. Abraham made space in his life for them. He made everything that was his, available to them.

Being hospitable means making room. Literally it means making room for others to join you. Opening a door. Pulling up a chair. Making a building accessible. Consciously removing barriers that keep people from being part of your group. It means widening the circle. Instead of talking only to those you know, make space for those you don't know.

Instead of inviting the same people to dinner, invite those that are new or different. Make space, make room, and be prepared, in the name of our Lord, to have company.

Sometimes, we don't make room for strangers. Sometimes, at work and at school and at church, we act like new folks are in charge of themselves and should just fit in on their own. In our last worship committee meeting we wondered how we could be more hospitable to new people who might come to join us. One thing we decided to do was put a description of what our worship is on our website. And we decided to put some new icons and explanations in the bulletin; that tell you when to speak and listen and sing and pray. And, look at this, in the

communion part, it explains how you respond when you get that little piece of bread and that cup of juice. When the elder offers it to you, you say, Thanks be to God. Because this place is God's place. And we want to welcome others as God has welcomed us. The point of Communion is God saying to us: "You are not a stranger any more. Come to my table and belong to my community."

Sharing that kind of hospitality means that first, we must be prepared. And second, it means making room. And third, it means being gracious to whoever shows up. Jesus reminds us that hospitality means humility. This Table is not our Table, it is the Lord's table. As we have found a place, we must offer a place to others, to whoever might come; even if it's not who we expect. Jesus tells a story about how God's kingdom is like a wedding banquet. When the time comes for the party, the ones who were invited won't show up. And the host will try to track them down, but the invited guests will say they can't make it; they aren't available; they have more pressing matters to attend to. So God will invite in the poor and the lame and the outcast. That's how it will be in the kingdom of God. The guests you thought would come, won't. So

welcome those who do come; those on the outside, those on the sidelines, those with nothing else to do and nowhere else to go, who are just waiting for a welcome.

We might spend time worrying about the people we wish would could welcome. Those who used to join us. Those who seem cool and fun. The imaginary people we WISH would be part of our group. The exciting people. The attractive people. The people we want to be friends with, with their 2.3 kids and disposable income and time to volunteer. Not the stressed people. Or the awkward people. Or the lonely people. Or the people who are different. The strangers or the aliens. Or the ones who require a bit of our effort or a bit of our time. Jesus says in the Kingdom of God, it's these who will get God's hospitality. And God is waiting to see if we will be gracious to the ones who show up. To the ones in our path. The ones on the road before us; the ones who are dusty and tired and in need of a good meal and a place to rest. Remember, the Bible says, remember that YOU were once strangers. Remember that YOU were once outsiders. Remember that YOU were once aliens in the land of Egypt.

Welcome those before you. Be prepared to be gracious to whomever God has put in your path. Because by so doing, some have entertained angels. Some have found that they have experienced a moment with God. When we make room. When we make time. When we make an effort to notice others and help them feel at home. Something special happens. Something holy happens. We experience God's holy hospitality. And at this table together, we remember how Jesus shared that with us. How Jesus made room for us. How Jesus made space for us. For all who need a welcome, to know that someone is glad they are here. Remember me, Jesus says. Remember me when you gather at my Table.