

Expressions of Hospitality

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Mark 12:38-44

There's a great spiritual leader named Jean Vanier who writes:

“Universal peace can only come if we develop and awaken the capacity to love people, to respect them deeply, and to live authentic relationship with others, to yearn for truth and justice in the huge family of humanity.”

How do we develop and awaken our capacity to love people? I think one of the first ways that we are being taught about today to do this is through the expression of hospitality. Hospitality, as well as invitation. Jesus teaches us that hospitality is more than simply asking someone to stay with you or offering them a meal. Jesus says that hospitality is about serving one another. Showing love, building community, as well as being a reflection of God in the world.

To explore this Biblical understanding of hospitality a bit more: hospitality is a way of showing kindness and generosity to people, reflecting what God offers all of us as faithful followers. So it should be a reflection of what God has given to us freely offered to others through kindness and generosity. Hospitality should also be done with a willing heart. When intentions are pure. The kind of hospitality that Jesus demonstrates, that is kind. It is the kind that comes with the sense of the pure of heart – and when we're talking about the pure of heart, we mean that whatever we do, we do it without hidden motives. We do it out of the goodness, out of the purity of our heart. When we offer hospitality, what can emerge from that is a stronger sense of community. It promotes acceptance and belonging, reconciliation among people. Through the act of hospitality, we are living out our call to love one another as Jesus loves us. Hospitality, in its purest form of living is living out the greatest commandment: loving not only our neighbour, but also the stranger. We know that Jesus crossed barriers of race and class, culture and gender identity. Jesus preached and practiced unconditional love. Love of God, love of neighbour, love of friend, love of enemy...and Jesus commanded his followers to love one another as he loved them.

Today, we're continuing the journey of Ruth and Naomi that we began to explore last Sunday, and if you weren't here, I suggest you go back to the recording and listen to Renee's storytelling of the whole story of Ruth and Naomi. But to give you the basics: Naomi had a couple daughters-in-law, lost her husband, lost her sons. Two daughters-in-law, she told both of them to go back home, but Ruth refused. Ruth said, "Wherever you go, I will go. Whoever you believe in, I will believe in. I will be with you always." So then we get to the point where they didn't have anything more where they were, so they took refuge back in the hometown of Naomi. When they got there, they had nothing. Being women, they didn't own anything, and so they had to scrape by with whatever they could do. Ruth took it upon herself to work the fields, to take the wheat out from the fields. Once the workers had gone through, they always left a little bit extra for the people who didn't have enough. So Ruth would diligently go and gather this grain so that her mother-in-law and her could survive. As it turns out, she was working in the field of Boaz, and after some time, Ruth approached Boaz to consider taking her as his wife. Boaz decided in the end that that was what he would do. He wanted to marry Ruth and because of that, Ruth and Naomi both experienced safety and security, which is something I think all humans seek and desire in life.

This was truly a demonstration of how Ruth and Naomi were dependent on the kindness of strangers. When they sought refuge in Moab – that is where they found hospitality. This story, though, shows us how God can work in surprising ways through human hospitality. We know that Jesus' ministry called out prejudice and discrimination and animosity. God, through Jesus and the Spirit, invites people of faith to live in the spirit of openness, radical hospitality, inclusion, acceptance, and affirmation. When we think about Ruth: Ruth was a Moabite. Ruth did not come from the place where the Israelite people came. In this, what we learn is that Boaz offered radical hospitality to the two of them. By all accounts, Boaz should not have even interacted with Ruth, because Moabites were considered to be awful. People you shouldn't hang around with. People you shouldn't even approach or speak with. But God chose Boaz to go against the traditions; to challenge the prejudice, and instead fell in love and took her as his wife. An act of radical hospitality.

In Mark, we find other examples of this. About how people are called to live. In this passage, Jesus is starting by reminding his disciples of the pitfalls that lurk just around the corner. For many religious people like the scribes that Jesus speaks of have the potential to proclaim their faith but also present it in an elitist attitude.

Sometimes, leaders in faith traditions, people of faith can lose and forget their way. They forget the purpose that God has called us to. They about our motivations and intentions. Jesus, then, after calling out some of these people in long robes who were praying just to be seen...Jesus then shares the story of this poor widow and her gift of two copper coins. It would be easy for us – and often we have – to focus on this as a great sacrifice. In the sense that the widow gave more than all the other people gave to the treasury. For she gave all that she had. In today's world, we have come to believe that sacrifice means giving up more than we should and less than we can. Biblically speaking, sacrifice is actually something of value that is offered as an act of devotion and worship to God. That is what the widow did. The coins that the widow gave to the treasury was an act of devotion and faith. Worshipping God in that action.

With this understanding, the coins, then, represent more than just financial gain. They represent her faith, her belief, and how she felt she was called to live her life in a concrete way. The coins represent faith-filled offering found in presenting all of who we are and all that we hope to become to God for the service in this world. So we're being invited today to live our lives in a way that offers all that we have, in the most purest of forms, so that we truly share what we have been given freely by God with others.

As we walk towards Remembrance Day, it is important to remember the sacrifice that others made for us so that we can live in a country with freedom and with relative safety. People answered the call for justice in the world. Today, we are being invited to witness to our faith through acts of hospitality. We need to honour what people have offered, and what people still offer. We also need to stop devaluing what each of us has been given. Know that everything that we have, when we act on it in a way that is loving towards other people, is exactly what God is calling us to do. It doesn't matter how long, how much...what matters is our intentions. And that we are making a difference by sharing that with others. We are being reminded today that our primary focus as a community of faith is to care for the orphaned. The widowed, the refugee, the poor, the people in need. We need to live in a way that demonstrates this. We, like the disciples, need to think carefully about our actions. We need to be clear about our intentions and our motivations. So I wonder: what legacy have the people before us left? What legacy will we leave for the people who come after us? I hope and pray that our intentions will be honourable. And I ask God and pray: may our intentions ensure that all people are cared for, loved, and accepted for who they are. May we be

motivated by the promise that some day the world will live in peace and shalom. That that peace will surpass all understanding.

We go back to the quote I started with: “Universal peace can only come if we develop and awaken our capacity to love people. To respect them deeply and to live authentic relationships with others.” That is how truth and justice will come in this world. That is how we will find peace, and it takes every single one of us. Thank God that God has given us so many wonderful gifts to share, and may we do it spirit that the widow did. Amen.