

Practise Hospitality

COMMENDING

So, where I wonder, do you feel most at home when you are not at home? Who are the people who help you to feel that you are welcome, that you belong, and that nothing is too much trouble as they look after your comfort and well-being?

Blessed are they who find such a place.

The ethic of hospitality is so deeply embedded in so many cultures, that it is easy to suggest that it is a part of our very psyche, part of what it means to be fully human.

“To receive welcome and care for guests, visitors and strangers with liberality and goodwill” is something that is so valued, it is hard to conceive of civilisation without it.

How strange, then, that whilst in the past century we have heard more and more about XENOPHOBIA – we have adopted the Greek word for fear or hatred of the stranger and do not bother any longer to translate it; but by contrast, how many will have heard of PHILOXENIA – substituting Philia, for Phobia; replacing fear with love – practising HOSPITALITY.

In the Bible

You do not go far in Scripture without coming across astonishing examples of hospitality offered with a lavishness that is almost incredible.

Perhaps one of the best known examples is that of Genesis 18: 1-15: so well known that it has become the subject of many classical paintings.

Abraham – (notice *Abraham* – the one from where three of the great World Religions trace their ancestry). Having a quiet snooze under a shady trees spots three strangers approach and his hospitality instincts leaps unto action – kilos of finest flour; the best of the stall-fed goats – nothing is too much trouble...

In Exodus we have the harrowing account of how the Israelites are treated in Egypt, so it's hardly surprising that in Leviticus 19: 33 – 34 we have the injunction:

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you.... You shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt...”.

Leap over to the New Testament and in the text read already from Romans 12 we have the reminder that care is not just for fellow members of the Christian family – contribute to the need of the saints, yes, but also extend hospitality to strangers.

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And in Hebrews 13: 1-3 we have the scope developed and extended:
Mutual love... Within the household of faith;
Hospitality to strangers - remember what happened to Abraham;
Think about, show concern for, detainees - as though you were a
prisoner with them - those who are being tortured.

But it is not just in the Bible that we find this message

References in Other Cultures

1. Classical Greek thinking: sacred hospitality, under the protection of Zeus, Leader of the Pantheon
2. In Indian folk lore the notion of ATHITI DEVO BHAVA - numerous stories of the poor offering their little and finding that their unknown Guest is God...
3. Nearer home, the Celtic tradition even in the height of Clan warfare the code of the MacGregors that led to their protecting of their sworn enemy.
4. And each of us can tell of the traditions and expectations of hospitality, in which we shared in the Pacific or African, or Caribbean or Far East.
 - Generous, lavish, welcome.... nothing is too much.

So I suggest

It is that COMMITMENT to hospitality that we want to see developed, strengthened, and extended throughout this DISTRICT.

COMMITMENT

A. The Ideology of being hospitable

That it is instinctive; spontaneous; second nature.... The stranger is not a stranger, but one of us... made to feel at ease on their terms, not ours...

1. In Church

While the welcome is good in many places, sadly, it is not the experience of a significant number who enter our churches...

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- Church stewards are so busy they do not have time to notice who's there
- Welcome stewards who barely manage to give the books - no smile no warmth
- Members so engrossed in chatting with friends, not aware of who else is around...

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- And none of this is compensated for by the elaborate/ embarrassing recognition that may be offered later.

2. In Community

- Buildings that seem to say keep out inaccessible, unfriendly...
- Fear of the stranger beyond the safety of Church. Asylum seekers, Refugees: not in my back yard

Change of mind and of heart: ideological commitment

B. Material - being hospitable can be costly;
Hard work under taken under risky conditions

C. Spiritual Commitment

Hospitality as a spiritual discipline

The conviction that this is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ...

Not just receiving and welcoming - but going out of our way to defend support and preserve the dignity of the stranger...

Reconnecting with the deep wells of spirituality and faith which have become blocked by the debris and boulders of culture and xenophobia.

That will lead to - what I see as

THE COMPLETING OF HOSPITALITY

A. Roles

We become more aware of

1. The Stages in the role

- Welcome
- Protecting
- Compensating and Equalising (preserving the dignity of the stranger; host and stranger having the same 'dignitas'/worth and showing mutual respect)
- Guidance on the way (next stage of journey for them)

Recent survey: Five practices of fruitful congregations - include "Radical Hospitality"

And then, perhaps we see also possibilities for

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2. The Switches in the roles

Sometimes ROLES become interchangeable

- i. Jesus who sits at the table as guest and steers the conversation;
- ii. Jesus who takes the towel and basin and washes the feet...

As we practise hospitality, Where do we sit in relation to the groups identified?

B. The Relay

When we get it right then it becomes another stage in the Hospitality Relay - the baton passes from one runner to the next..

Peter Whittaker, Chair of the West Yorkshire District, speaks of Touchstone in Bradford as a place where we are -.. "Allowing ourselves to be changed by the people we welcome."

Google the word 'hospitality' and 12.9m references come up; but only a little more than 10 refer to hospitality as an Ethic; the rest refer to the hospitality *industry*!

For us, I suggest, it is not a duty, or an industry, but a spiritual discipline and delight.

But what this means in relation to:

- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Other Christian who us our premises
- Non-Church groups in the neighbourhood
- Christians from different Methodist Conferences
- The kind of space we create
- And people who are homeless and rootless

What does it mean to be Good News in a Global City - Offering hospitality?
This we invite you to explore further in a series of workshops.