

Jeremiah 2: 4-13

Psalm 81: 1, 10-16

Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16

St. Luke 14: 1, 7-14

Pentecost 12 2022.

---

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Hebrews 13: 2

The Lord Jesus would often tell parables to teach us how to live. As the old Sunday School curriculum read, parables are “earthly stories, with heavenly meanings...” “Earthly stories, with heavenly meanings...”

Today, I’d like to tell a story of my own... Once upon a time, there was a young couple who lived near the sea, and they had 2 children. The older boy was a smart lad, and about the time he started school, he began asking his mother hard questions, like, “Where is heaven?” and “Why did Jesus die?...”

His mother didn’t know how to answer these questions well, so she drove down the road to a local Anglican church called “St. James’,” and she put her kids in Sunday School, and she... went to church...

The mother wanted friends, but didn’t know how to start. Most of the folks in the pews were older than she was... She overheard a couple of ladies complaining that they were tired, and needed some help. The young mother thought, “*I can help...*”

A couple of Sundays later, there was an announcement at the end of the service, that there would be an upcoming fund-raiser, which would be a nice tea and an art auction. The young woman who lived by the sea thought: This is it! I can help with the tea and the art auction!...

On the day of the fundraiser, the young mother drove to St. James’ with some excitement. As things got underway, she began to serve, but then she was suddenly told, “That’s not how we serve at St. James’” – and someone began doing her job... Puzzled, the young mother switched to making the coffee, only to be told, “That’s not how we make coffee at St. James’...” The young mother became more and more disheartened as the day went on... Eventually, she quietly withdrew from parish life, and no one seemed to notice...

Now, this is not a parish where I have served, but it really happened... The names have been changed, to protect the guilty...

We can see that, although the older workers really were tired, but the expectation is that someone new would do things exactly the way things always had been done... That’s not realistic. And, although this parish was probably like most Canadian Anglicans, who rate their parish as “very friendly,” what that really meant was, “*I have friends here...* But that doesn’t mean that we offer warm hospitality to someone new...

Today's second lesson is from Hebrews 13... Most of the Letter to the Hebrews teaches a lot of theology. The author of Hebrews was determined to show that the way of following Jesus is more faithful and life-giving, in response to God... But the last chapter of Hebrews, chapter 13, is different: We read lots of practical advice – about married life, the leadership of the Church, and the exercise of love. (Remember, this is written for us all.) The chapter begins, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels without knowing it...” “Let mutual love continue... show hospitality...” This is not some ivory-tower theory. It's a very practical matter before us this morning: How do we treat people — especially people we don't know – from the time they first step *onto* the property, until the time they leave?...

All of us know we need to be welcoming, but we might not be sure how to put our hospitality into practice...

I saw an example about how to do hospitality really well at the auction, a week from last Friday. I was sitting at a table with a parishioner and her parents; no one else was at that table. At a break around dessert, someone got up from her table, walked over to *our* table, extended her hand, and gave her name. The older couple shook hands with her, and gave her *their* names. She chatted for a moment or two – some light conversation about the evening and what was going to be auctioned -- and then she went back to her seat. That was all the parishioner did, but that interaction was just right!...

Let's consider these steps:

1. Don't wait for someone new to introduce themselves to you. Go to them.
2. Give your name, and learn their names.
3. If you both are near the guest book at the front door, please encourage them to sign the guest book if they're new. (That's how other people can learn their names, and maybe a follow-up contact if they include their address.)
4. Make a comment or ask a question. A few examples are, “Do you live around here?” or “Do you have the paper with the order of service?” or even, “Some weather we've been having, eh?”

Be positive. Focus on them. Not *staring* at someone new, but engaging. It's not about us. It's about them. And it's about the Lord Jesus...

5. Lastly, practice. Practice. Practice.

Hospitality is an art. It comes with practice. Some of may think, “I'm not good at small talk.” It comes with practice. It doesn't have to be fake. We're motivated by love...

Many years ago, a snobby city kid was ordained and sent to serve in a rural parish in central England. The young ordinand didn't know a thing about farming. He missed the city concerts and the city parties, and he thought the bishop was punishing him by sending him to this rural parish. The ordinand went to the archdeacon, and said, “I can't talk with

these people. They just want to talk about their crops...” The archdeacon listened very carefully, and then looked over his reading glasses, and said, “You’ve been given a great gift. You now have a chance to learn all things of things about crops...”

St. Paul puts it this way in First Corinthians 9:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some.

We don’t have to be an expert in biology to be friendly with a medical doctor. We don’t have to become an expert in transmissions to talk with a car mechanic. But we can be friendly and listening and learn a little bit, about what interests another person...

It’s not about us. It’s about them, and it’s about the Lord Jesus...

Now, a lot of hospitality is simply the warmth of people we meet. But as a parish, we can also do practical things – like making sure it’s clear where the bathrooms are; the lighting is bright; the order of service is clear; and we are modelling how to worship...

A month or two ago, the St. Brice’s Spiritual Development Committee chose “hospitality” as a good sermon topic today, because it’s toward the end of summer; and after the COVID restrictions, we want to encourage everyone to come back to worship... Isn’t it just like God that the second lesson today specially mentions “hospitality...?”

In our reading from Luke 14, Jesus Christ teaches about inviting, welcoming. Verse 13: “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” Our hospitality needs to be specially directed toward those on the margins, those in need...

And we’re to take a humble place at the meal table – it’s not about us; it’s about the others, and the Lord Jesus. Verse 8 and following,

‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this person your place”, and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, “Friend, move up higher”; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’

Our Saviour says, “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

To put this message into practice, let’s take a moment to find someone we don’t know so well, be sure to say your name and to get their name, and learn *one thing* about that person you didn’t know before...

... May our faith not just be facts for our heads and warmth in our hearts, but show forth by the hospitality we show at St. Brice’s. Amen.