

Tracy Daub
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Luke 10:1-12

HOSPITALITY

In our overly scheduled lives, it's not a surprise that we sometimes make mistakes in our calendars. We double book ourselves for two events on the same day. Or we completely space out and forget a meeting. And then we get the embarrassing email: "Hey, my calendar said we were meeting today at Starbucks. Didn't see you there. Call me."

Now, using our imaginations for a minute, imagine getting such an email from God. "Hey, my reign came very close to you this morning and you completely missed it. Meet you next time? GOD"

Imagine missing the reign of God. That is what the gospel reading from Luke is about—it's about missing the realm of God when it shows up. In our passage today Jesus is preparing to send out 70 disciples in pairs to do ministry. We hear Jesus give them some instructions about what to take and how to conduct themselves. In their travels, the disciples are to rely upon the hospitality of strangers, of those who don't know them. But Jesus gives them these instructions with a warning: not everyone will welcome them.

In the contemporary language version of the text we read today, Jesus says to the disciples, "When you enter a town and are received, eat what they set before you, heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, 'God's kingdom is right on your doorstep.'" But then Jesus adds, "When you enter a town and are not received, go out into the street and say, 'The only thing we go from you is the dirt on our feet, and we're giving it back. Did you have any idea that God's kingdom was right on your doorstep?'"

Did you have any idea that God's kingdom was right on your doorstep? Sounds a lot like our imaginary email from God: "My reign came close to you this morning and you completely missed it."

I think it is fair to say that we gathered here today do not want to miss seeing the realm of God. But what does it look like? Our reading today offers a clue.

The group of 70 disciples were sent out by Jesus as ambassadors, as witnesses, as proclaimers to the realm of God. But Jesus doesn't equip them with very many material resources for the trip. Think about what you do before taking a trip. You pack all the items you know you will need—the clothing, the camera, the money, the passport, the comfortable shoes, the rain jacket or umbrella, the snacks you will need. But that is not Jesus' strategy for taking a road trip. Jesus instructs his followers to take virtually nothing.

And the purpose of packing light is for his disciples to be dependent upon the hospitality of others. If you take everything you will need with you on your trip, then you are self-reliant. You don't need other people. But Jesus understands the wisdom and the value in our needing one another, in our caring for one another. Jesus' instructions to his core of missionaries are designed to foster hospitality.

Hospitality becomes a central theme in this passage and is a core ingredient of the kingdom of God. Hospitality is the opposite of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Hospitality involves the forming of relationships of care and assistance. It is about welcoming the stranger.

Can you think about a time when you received warm and genuine hospitality? It is not uncommon for those occasions to occur when we are traveling because that is often when we are most vulnerable and without our usual resources. When we are at home, in our own communities, living in our own homes, we cushion ourselves with all kinds of resources. We do

our best to shield ourselves from the things that can make us vulnerable. But when you travel, even with great preparation, you can often find yourself in situations of need. I can think of so many occasions when I was traveling and complete strangers came to my aid or assistance.

Maybe you have a similar story.

But hospitality can also show up at home. Our city of Buffalo is often referred to as “the city of good neighbors,” for how people extend hospitality and assistance to one another. Maybe you experience hospitality at the grocery store when standing in line and realizing you forgot your wallet. Maybe it came from the welcome you received by your in-laws. Maybe it came in the ways people reached out to you when your spouse was hospitalized. Hospitality is the welcome given to others who lack resources—physical resources, emotional resources, social resources, financial resources. And the giving and the receiving of hospitality lies at the heart of the kingdom of God.

We could even consider Jesus’ coming among us, living as one of us, as God’s great act of hospitality—when God extended a welcome to us when we had made ourselves strangers to God, when God assisted us in our time of need. Jesus is God’s gift of hospitality to us.

What we learn from this passage is that welcoming those who lack resources, assisting and caring for the stranger, is central to the kingdom of God. Central. Jesus has some pretty strong judgement for those who refuse to offer hospitality. He tells the 70 that “Sodom will have it better on Judgement Day than the town that rejects you.”

Sodom—as in Sodom and Gomorrah. Even if you don’t remember the story about Sodom in the Old Testament, you probably associate that name with concepts of immorality and debauchery and God’s great judgement against that city’s behavior. In fact, the word *sodomy* derives from that Old Testament city’s name, further emphasizing the belief that the city’s sin

was rooted in perceived immoral behavior. But Sodom's sin was not sexual immorality. If you go back and read that particular Old Testament story, one discovers that Sodom's sin was its failure to extend hospitality to the stranger. Jesus has strong words of judgement against those who refuse hospitality through their actions or their words.

This weekend as we celebrate our nation's Independence Day, I think about the Statue of Liberty and what an important symbol it offers of our nation's ideal of hospitality. You may recall the Emma Lazarus quote on the Statue proclaiming this nation's hospitality to the vulnerable:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

I say the Statue is a symbol of the American *ideal* of hospitality because our nation has not always lived out this hospitality toward others. Throughout our history, one group of people after another has had to struggle to be accepted, to be treated justly, or even to be allowed in at all. But the ideal of hospitality is important because it beckons us forward, calls us as a nation to do better even as we remember with honesty and humility the ways we have failed.

A far greater symbol of hospitality lies before us today. Christ's table. What better symbol could there be of hospitality than a table? Jesus invites us to join him at this banquet where he feeds us with love and forgiveness. And then once fed, he sends us out to extend this same hospitality to one another. To stock the shelves at a food pantry. To tutor children learning English. To drive someone to an appointment. To march in a Pride parade and proclaim God's welcoming love. To raise money for more grocery stores in an underserved part of town. To extend a hand of forgiveness to someone who has hurt us.

Jesus reminds us that the kingdom of God is close, very close. The kingdom of God is as close as your next opportunity to love. The kingdom of God is as close as your next opportunity to forgive. The kingdom of God is as close as your next opportunity to share, to serve, to speak up, to take a risk for someone else. Today, this day, God's kingdom is right on your doorstep.