

Hospitality

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

Today's reading from Genesis picks up where we were last week when three men show up at Abraham's home and everyone rushes to make a feast for their unexpected guests; it is hospitality on a grand scale.

The veal is tender, tons of bread and everyone is stuffed to the gills!

That's last week.

This week, those same three guests make their way to Sodom and Gomorrah — and what greets them is anything but hospitality!

You know about Sodom and Gomorrah!

Those wicked towns that get wiped off the face of the earth, the place where Lot's wife turns and in the turning is changed into a pillar of salt.....

That's where Abraham's guests go for a visit — where they are mugged and nearly lynched, by people whose idea of The Welcome Wagon is an invitation to be gang raped!

That's the nightmare that takes us into today's reading, with Abraham dickering with God over the fate of thousands, negotiating for their survival if only 50 or 30 or 10 hospitable people can be found.

Alas, even 10 can't be found and the city is wiped out.

When we kill hospitality, we kill who we are....

We see threats to hospitality all over the place these days, from the fear mongering and chest thumping that passes for political speech to that small minority earning ungodly sums while so many struggle just to put food on the table, to the struggle of racial and ethnic minorities to find a seat at the table.

When we kill hospitality, we kill who we are....

Which is maybe why hospitality is at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer, a prayer that begins with recognizing that God is not some distant and distracted deity, but Our Father, who lives not far away, but in heaven, which, because of Jesus, is right next door!

We know heaven is close because Jesus keeps reminding us that the Kingdom of God is near, the kingdom is among you, the kingdom is within you....because the finger of this hospitable God is even now moving throughout the earth....

In Jesus, heaven and earth intersect - in Jesus, the earth is restored to what it was always intended to be - the sign of God's great love pouring itself out in the never-ending miracle of creation.

It is through the hospitality of God that everything exists.

And so, after recognizing God's sovereignty over this world, Jesus moves directly to our real human needs: please feed us, please forgive us, please protect us...

In other words, "Please God, be hospitable to us!"

We ask for God's hospitality so that we too may be hospitable to others, not just to those from our own clan or tribe or country, but especially to the stranger, to the weird, the outcast.

That kind of hospitality allows us to glimpse the truth of our situation: that we are not alone in this world, that our fate doesn't depend on our ability to save ourselves, that our solutions are not in walls or guns or making our country great again, but in letting go of all those things, in dying to our best thinking, in forgiving debts that are justly owed to us, for it is then that we find ourselves safely in the embrace of the God of hospitality, no matter what happens.

Which is why that young man who assassinated police officers last week in Baton Rouge is so terribly mistaken when he claims that only through violence can needed change happen.

Which is why many white men are so terribly mistaken when they deny the undeniable privileges we have received in this country, by virtue simply of our race and gender, at the expense of so many others....

Jesus invites all of us to recognize that our best thinking creates the very problems we now face - that the only way to peace and justice is to become who we are - people who have died in Christ - people who, because we are dead, can then experience the great and glorious gift of resurrection.

That's what Paul is telling the Colossians this morning:

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition....."

Meaning: when folks start talking about "might makes right" and "look out for number one," RUN!, because that's the devil talking!

"For in Jesus the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority."

Meaning, that in Jesus, the crucified one, who lived a life of humble service, we see the very face of God, that our task isn't to admire Jesus, but to follow him.

"In him ... you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ..."

Just as physical circumcision cuts away the foreskin, spiritual circumcision cuts away our own best thinking, leaving us to rely on the foolish message of the cross..., that in giving we receive, in forgiving we are forgiven, in dying that we find real life.

"And when you were dead in sin..., God made you alive together with him, ... forgiving us all our trespasses, erasing all our wrongs, nailing them to the cross."

We are set free not because of who we are but because of who God is; not by what we have done, but by what God has done for us in Christ.

That's the point of the sleeping neighbor and his insistent friend in today's gospel.

It's not a story about buttering up God.

It's that God couldn't care less about our explanations (which is why the sleeping neighbor doesn't give a hoot that there's a hungry traveler or that his host forgot to go to Safeway that day).

The sleeping neighbor climbs out of bed because of the shameless pounding on his door!

Proper people don't pound at midnight.

Proper people don't recognize that they are in fact dead....instead they parade around in search of money, power and fame, the idle philosophies that Paul cautions against today.

But we Christians know we are already dead, we know God is only interested in our shameless recognition that we are dead — and that it is our death, not our good

looks or good deeds, but dying to OUR WAY OF DOING THINGS — this is what enables us to be raised from the dead, and enter into the hospitality of God.

The greatest threat to hospitality is fear.

We see this fear being drummed up when the conversation turns to welcoming refugees from Syria and other war torn lands; we see it in our political rhetoric nearly every day.

Which is why being dead is actually so cool!

If I'm already dead, what's there to be afraid of?

If I'm already dead, I don't need to worry about this immigrant taking my job, or buying that gun to defend myself, or looking to get into another war to protect my way of life.

That's why Christianity is not a religion.

Religion is about humanity seeking God, trying to pacify God, trying to do the right thing for God, so we can **preserve our right to run the show on this side of the grave.**

In short, religion is about a life of limited, even nonexistent, hospitality.

On the other hand, Christianity is about **God seeking us, finding us, dying for us,** and then inviting us into that death so that we, like Jesus, may also rise again — not as a disembodied spirit at the end of this physical life, but today, in the midst of the abundant creation that God makes everyday — giving us the courage and the capacity to extend limitless hospitality to everyone we meet — to everyone in need — just as God extends limitless hospitality to all of creation....

+amen

