

Matthew 10:40-42

‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

Sermon

More and more, I believe that hospitality is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus.

When you invite others into your life and community it can lead to amazing experiences of growth and fellowship. My friend David is a pastor in West New Bern, North Carolina. You might remember that a few years ago, a devastating hurricane hit the east coast, and New Bern was one of the places that was hardest hit. Well, instead of giving up, or turning inward, this Presbyterian church fell back on what they knew how to do best: Hospitality. They opened the doors of their building for groups of volunteers who wanted to come and give their time to help New Bern rebuild and recover after the storm. They gave them a place to sleep and provided meals for volunteers who were coming long after the storm subsided and the waters receded. Through their hospitality, and the work of these strangers, their town found recovery and new life.

And I know that’s a nice story when I tell it, but I’m sure that it was a lot more difficult than it sounds. Hospitality can be that way most of the time. It sounds wonderful, until you find out that the reality of it is often a lot of hard work and dirty dishes. I’m sure it wasn’t easy for church members to spend time cooking for others when they were worried about their insurance claims coming through. I imagine it was tough to provide shelter for strangers when they had plenty of friends who had lost their homes.

But, the reality of our passage for today is that Jesus doesn’t just call us to welcome only the good house-guests or the generous neighbors who come to visit.

Our call is to offer hospitality to everyone we meet, even the people who snore so loud you can hear them through the walls of the guest room, even the people who don’t bring a dish to the potluck. Jesus says that we are to welcome even the prophets who come through our neighborhoods.

And that sounds nice too, but in reality is no easy thing to ask.

The prophets, in the Bible, are often the last people you want to welcome into your community. They are John the Baptist out in the desert, covered in camel's hair and eating bugs. Samuel, the little boy who keeps waking you up in the middle of the night, because he thinks he hears God's voice. Elijah, who was so stubborn that he laid on his side, refusing to get up for 430 days. Hosea, who names his kids "Unloved" and "Not My People" just to prove a point. Or Isaiah, who wandered the streets barefoot and naked while he preached God's Word for three years straight.

And beyond their weirdness, these prophets make us uncomfortable because they carry a message from God that calls us to change, to do the hard work of growth and reformation. They are the people who are not content to let us stay the same. They call us to take off our rose-colored glasses and see the world as it really is, broken and in need of reconciliation. They point us toward the better world that God is preparing, but don't shy away from reminding us of all the labor we need to do to get there.

It is these people, who carry God's uncomfortable truths, that Jesus singles out when he wants us to see just how tough real hospitality can be. Because, though try as we might to ignore the voice, God is not done speaking.

We hardly even read the stories of these crazy prophetic acts in church, because too often, we try to avoid the difficult parts of Christian life, like taking up our crosses, but God is never going to give up on trying to get our attention and helping us live in the way of His Son - with compassion and mercy, selflessness and hospitality for all.

So I wonder... who are the prophets that God is sending to us in these days? How is God continuing to speak and call us into new life?

And what are we doing, to open the doors: of our homes, our church, and our hearts, so that we might welcome them in, with all the uncomfortable good news that God has sent them to carry to us?

How can we show hospitality to the prophets of the new life that God is bringing into our world?

- Will we read books written by people from different cultures than our own, knowing that they might change our world-view?
- Will we try to make friends with people of different skin-tones and backgrounds, knowing that seeing the world through their eyes might cause us to face some difficult truths about our society?
- Will we reach out to the poor and the hungry, the thirsty and the lonely - knowing that a relationship with someone in their position might force us to expand our generosity and give away something that we have come to hold dear?

- Will we stand beside the people who strive for justice, so that they need not be alone in their work to move us toward the righteous world that God desires for us to share together?

When Jesus left this world, he said that he was “going to prepare a room for us, in his Father’s house.” He laid the groundwork for our hospitality, by welcoming us first - even though we had not earned it and did not deserve it. Even though we had no right to a room in that place. He loved us enough to make the bed, to set the table, to advocate for us before the judge of our lives, and to invite us in to stay forever.

So let us follow in the way of Christ, by showing hospitality, even and especially to those who make us uncomfortable, trusting that when we welcome them, The Holy Spirit might work, to rebuild our broken communities, to restore our fractured relationships, and to build up amongst us, the very Kingdom of God. Amen.

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