

Sermon Transcript

God's Hospitality

Luke 24:48-49 and Acts 10:1-17; 34-35 | Seventh Sunday After Pentecost | July 7, 2024 |
John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

In 2007, a young industrial designer named Brian Chesky was living in San Francisco. He and his roommate Joe were struggling to pay rent, so they decided to inflate three air mattresses and posted an invitation on a blog for travelers to San Francisco to crash at their place for \$80 a night.

Conveniently, there was an Industrial Design Conference and one of the attendees was a man named Amol Surve who couldn't afford a hotel.

Amol saw the post and decided to give it a shot.

Not only did Amol attend his conference, but the two roommates asked him to help in their brainstorming session for a new hospitality venture they were working on.

They took Amol sight-seeing and then out to a great Mexican restaurant that was off the beaten path.

Chesky even drove Amol all the way to Stanford University to attend a guest lecture. He didn't just attend a conference, he experienced life in San Francisco.

As Amol said, "It's amazing how one trip can have such an impact on your life."

For the two roommates, the encounter transformed them as well.

"There's this whole way of traveling—I call it mass tourism—where you just stay in a hotel district and do things that the people who live there would never do. There's no real connection, and you leave the city not really having any impression of what it's like to live there."

Chesky realized that they might be on to something.

More and more people rented out a bed in their apartment and when he pitched his company in the founders letter before the Initial Public Offering, he described the experience like this:

"Our guests arrived as strangers, but they left as our friends."

Eventually, this small idea of providing a place to crash became a \$100 billion dollar company known as Airbnb.

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“It wasn’t our intention to disrupt the travel industry,” Chesky says. “It was our intention to host people in our homes. There is a significantly more authentic way of traveling that’s based on human connection. This was an idea that’s quite obvious in hindsight.”

(DEF of hospitality) Hospitality is the act of being friendly and welcoming to guests and visitors.

When we’ve stayed at an Airbnb, including on our recent vacation out west, the hospitality isn’t just on the hosts, it’s also a reflection of the guests.

As a visitor, the host gets to evaluate how clean you left the place and if they’d rent to you again. That affects your ability to book a house elsewhere.

When we travel, we make sure to plan into our departure enough time to clean up and follow all the instructions that the host has requested.

Hospitality is a two-way street.

As we continue to discover through the book of Acts, God’s hospitality brings people together in unique ways. Often, it’s people that normally would not be associated with each other.

God’s hospitality is not exactly “easy”. It’s not loaning out a house with the owners gone and making sure everything is left in place when you leave.

No, God’s hospitality is messy.

God’s hospitality involves treating people we find repulsive as equals—like the Samaritans in Acts 8.

God’s hospitality involves communicating with people across significant differences in customs and cultures—like Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

God’s hospitality involves entrusting leadership to your mortal enemy who was seeking you out to imprison you—like Ananias does with Saul.

And now, God’s hospitality brings Peter face to face with a Roman centurion and his closest friends and family.

In all of these stories, both the disciple and the outsider were brought together by God. As the stories are re-told, we can feel the anxiety and apprehension to meet.

It’s a strange story—Peter with a vision of all the unclean foods that he would never eat as a Jewish man. Clearly, God is intervening and breaking down barriers.

Three men, sent by Cornelius come to find Peter and tell him that their boss wants to talk. What does Peter do?

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So Peter invited in [the men sent by Cornelius] and gave them lodging. He shows hospitality.

Now, Peter is to go to Cornelius. This isn't as easy as it sounds. There are a lot of barriers that prevent Peter and his customs from entering the presence of a Cornelius.

In fact, when they meet, an interesting thing happens:

On Peter's arrival, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, worshiped him.

But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal."

"You yourselves know that it is improper for a Jew to associate with or to visit an outsider, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.

So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

That's when Cornelius retells the story of his encounter with the man in dazzling clothes—and explicit instructions to reach out to Peter.

For Peter, the vision he's had and this confirmation from Cornelius leads him to a startling conclusion:

"I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him.

The Holy Spirit arrives to those who hear the word of God and all of them are baptized. Then, the hospitality is returned.

Peter, who just reminded his hosts that it's improper for him to visit an outsider, accepts the invitation to stay with them for several days. Peter accepts THEIR hospitality. He considers them as insiders.

If you google church and hospitality, you enter a blog world of articles about how to attract and retain visitors.

I think I can understand why church hospitality has been reduced to making a church look great so people will want to stay—it's because churches want to grow. I get it.

But isn't deeper than that?

I'm more interested in hospitality for the sake of being hospitable. I want to gather in worship with fellow believers who want to learn how to build up the qualities of hospitality.

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I want to know that, in our hearts, we are friendly and welcome guests and visitors because it's genuine, authentic, and a reflection of God at work in our hearts.

This is Holy Spirit work—hospitality in the current era. It's not easy. We take it for granted.

If you don't believe me, maybe you'll believe our friend from the synod office, **Reverend Justin Grimm, who preached here in May (pic of JG).**

During our Brewed Theology time, Justin shared a story with us about his friends who were looking for a church recommendation. He told them to check out Faith.

So they did.

Justin's friends didn't have anyone talk to them or greet them.

They felt out of place and they left.

He didn't say this story to guilt us—he offered it as advice to consider what are we doing as a church to live into our welcome statement, to act on our desire to share God's good news with the world.

Genuine hospitality isn't one person's job. It's up to all of us.

Hospitality is what makes us Christian. It's what sets us apart in the world. It's what we do.

In the next month or so, new greeter teams are being formed. If you want to intentionally help greet people—one Sunday a month with back-ups for when you're traveling—write your name down at the Welcome Desk after worship.

This isn't a new concept. Greeters have been around for years. It's time to bring this back.

Even if you never sign up to be an official greeter, we are all hosts. Smiles, conversations, keeping our circle of friends wider instead of narrow—seeing someone sitting alone at coffee and joining them.

It's an essential habit to build up and carry with us out into the world. Do we notice who God is putting into our path? We might meet a new friend today.

Authentic human connection is what God is encouraging us to give... but also receive. That's the gift of this beautiful, messy church. Led by the Spirit to share God's grace.

We gather as strangers in this sanctuary and leave as friends in Christ. Amen.