

Unexpected Hospitality

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Exodus 2:1-10

Today we are continuing our Lenten Sermon series on Hospitality and Service. Last week Pastor Scott kicked off our series taking a closer look at a story in Genesis in which Abraham welcomed three strangers into his home and showed them really good hospitality, only to discover later that these men were in fact angels. The book of Hebrews tells us, do not neglect to show hospitality to others for you never know when you are entertaining Angels. From this as Christians we are charged to see every person we encounter (friend, enemy, or stranger) through this lens. They are a reflection of God and just might be bringing us a message of transformation or promise that can change our lives forever.

So, what is hospitality? Why are we focusing on this topic during lent? According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Hospitality is defined as kindness and friendly behavior, especially to guests. Miriam Webster's dictionary defines it as generous and cordial reception of guests. At its most basic understanding hospitality is about welcome and care for the other. As followers of Christ, I think there is a bit more to hospitality. Henri Nowen, a priest and author defines Hospitality as "the outward expression of an inner openness. Hospitality is the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place."

I want to acknowledge that the word hospitality has more associated with it than these definitions. There is the "hospitality industry" which refers to a wide range of businesses and services that focus on providing accommodations, food, beverages, entertainment, and other amenities to guests and customers. This definition may be related to the hospitality in our sermon series but is not what we are discussing. Also associated with this word is a long history of thinking of hospitality as "women's work" due to historical and cultural gender norms and expectations. Throughout history, women have traditionally been assigned roles within the domestic sphere all which includes cooking, cleaning, and caring for guests. It's important to recognize that hospitality is not inherently tied to gender. Both men and women are capable of practicing hospitality and creating welcoming and inclusive environments. As we focus

this Lenten season on the spiritual need for hospitality this is an invitation for men and women to participate fully in this work.

It is my conviction that biblical hospitality goes far beyond superficial gestures of welcome. Instead, hospitality is an important spiritual discipline that all of God's children are called to practice. It is not merely about cooking meals or hosting gatherings but about creating spaces of love, welcome, and inclusion where the presence of God can be experienced. When we extend hospitality, we emulate Christ's example of reaching out to the marginalized, embracing the stranger, and offering compassion to all. Regardless of gender, age, or background, practicing hospitality opens doors for deeper connections, fosters unity within communities, and reflects the transformative power of God's love in our lives. Therefore, it is important to recognize that hospitality is a sacred duty, and we are called to commit ourselves to embodying this spiritual discipline in our daily lives, welcoming all with open arms and hearts. In our current world, which many would describe as hostile, oppressive, and divisive, I feel convicted to have a focus on welcome, inclusion, and grace to all I encounter.

So, with all that in mind, we turn to the 2nd book of the bible, Exodus and we encounter a story where Pharaoh's daughter shows unexpected kindness and hospitality to the baby Moses, his sister, and his mother. In doing so, Pharaoh's daughter not only subverts the oppressive actions of her father (the pharaoh) but also paves the way for God's plan to unfold through Moses.

As a side note when reading the Bible, whenever women are prominent it is a signal for us readers to perk up and pay close attention! It almost always indicates that God is about to do something extraordinary and significant. The world that the Bible was written was without a doubt Patriarchal and our authors tend to only mention women when they are important to the story. Our authors are patriarchal, but God is not, and so throughout the biblical narrative we do get to witness women being used by God in remarkable ways.

The larger context of our reading today is that Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, is scared of the Israelites in the previous chapter: Pharaoh States:

the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us.

In an attempt to keep the Hebrews from growing in strength and numbers, he issued an evil decree to kill all Hebrew male babies by throwing them into the Nile river.

In our text today we witness several women defy these orders. Moses' mother successfully hides her baby for three months, but eventually is not able to hide the infant. So, she places her baby in the Nile River, but creates a safe basket (or boat) for the baby, and places the basket among the reeds near the bank of the river. I'm sure Moses' mother is desperate and prayerfully hoping God will intervene on behalf of her child. We are then told that the basket is noticed by Pharaoh's daughter, who opens the basket to find the baby Moses. I find there to be a lot of interesting details in what follows:

Pharaoh's daughter immediately knows what is going on, the author tells us that she stated "This must be one of the Hebrew children" She is not misguided or ignorant of why this baby is in the river. And still she moves to act on behalf of the child and his family. I think her heart opens and she shows unexpected hospitality and service to this family in need.

We are also told Pharaoh's daughter takes *Pity* on the baby, Hebrew word *chamal* is a bit tricky to translate into English but this word is translated in a variety of ways in our English translations. Our text today uses pity, another translates it has "felt sorry for" another translates it as she was "moved with compassion" the message translates this word as "Her heart went out to him." This word is used throughout the Hebrew bible which connotes "to be spared out of an act of compassion". It's not a word that directly correlates with our modern understanding of Pity. But what is clear from the text is that when Pharaoh's daughter is confronted face to face with the evil of her father's actions, she is not able to ignore it and she is compelled to act out of compassion, or at least act out of compassion on behalf of this one family. (there were many others suffering who did not receive this act of compassion)

Moses' sister, another female resisting evil in this story, goes to Pharaoh's daughter and offers to find a woman to nurse the baby, which then leads to a situation in which Moses' mother is being paid to nurse and care for her own child. She no longer must hide in fear but can confidently care for her child who is under the protection of the very household attempting to kill him.

I think that this act of hospitality is significant on multiple levels. It subverts the oppressive actions of the one in power, Pharaoh. While her father seeks to maintain power through fear and brutality, Pharaoh's daughter chooses a different path—a path of compassion, kindness, and hospitality. Pharaoh's daughter also leverages her own power and access to privilege to make way for God's plan through Moses. Despite being a member of the ruling class, she can see the humanity and worth of this Hebrew child.

Her willingness to defy her father's orders and adopt Moses as her own son ultimately sets the stage for Moses to fulfill God's call to deliver the Israelites from Egypt.

Pharaoh's daughter stands as an important symbol of hospitality precisely because she belongs to the "other side" of the conflict. It is my conviction that hospitality is connected to serving others and especially to those who we feel are "the other" or showing welcome and giving space to those who feel like our enemy. We are called to the kind of Hospitality in which we actively seek opportunities to serve those around us, whether it's through providing a warm meal to a hungry neighbor, offering a listening ear to a friend in distress, or welcoming a stranger into our midst. By serving others with kindness and compassion, we not only meet their practical needs but also create spaces where they can experience love, acceptance, and connection. Hospitality, therefore, is not merely a passive act of entertaining or hosting but is a spiritual practice that has the potential to reshape our world and usher in God's kingdom. When we extend hospitality to others—especially to those who are marginalized, oppressed, or in need—we participate in God's redemptive work in the world.

As Christians, we are called to embody the radical hospitality exemplified by Pharaoh's daughter. We are called to resist the forces of oppression and injustice and to create spaces of welcome and inclusion for all people. This means welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the vulnerable among us. May we, like Pharaoh's daughter, be agents of hospitality in a world desperately in need of kindness and compassion. May we subvert the powers of oppression and injustice through our actions of love and welcome. And may we always be open to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, who moves among us, inviting us to participate in His redemptive work.