

“Welcome One Another”

Genesis 18:1-16 • Romans 15:1-13

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 6, 2017

For the past few weeks we have been talking about several of the “one another” commands we find in the New Testament. We began with the command to love one another, which is the most important and most repeated of these “one another” commands. All the other commands are specific ways we are to love one another. God commands us to love each other sacrificially. We are to love one another the way Jesus loves us. We’re to love each other like family. Actually, you’ll remember that the Apostle Paul says we are to be as close as parts of the body. We *need* each other.

The problem is that when we’re that close, sometimes we hurt each other. That’s why God commands us to forgive one another. We can say we love one another, we can even believe we love one another, but when we are wronged we have the opportunity to prove we love one another by forgiving. Jesus made it clear that our willingness to forgive each other affects the way we experience God’s forgiveness.

The third command we looked at is Jesus’ command to serve one another. Of course he didn’t just tell us to do it, he demonstrated it. Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, a job usually done by servants. He told them, and us, that just as he stooped to serve them, they should serve one another. Then last week we looked at discipleship and the command that each of us is called to teach one another, which means each of us needs to be learning about Jesus and sharing what we learn with others.

Well there’s one more category of “one another” commands we want to look at. This is a little broader category but there are lots of verses that point us to it. Verse 7 of our reading from Romans 15 says, “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.” This word “welcome” can also be translated as receive or draw in. The picture we get from this passage is a call to be part of a warm, welcoming fellowship. Verses 5 and 6 are a prayer that God would grant “you to live in

such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When the church is truly functioning the way God intends, there is such a sense of belonging and fellowship that is truly attractive. So how do we live out that kind of fellowship? Biblical hospitality. Hospitality is defined as “the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.”

We don’t have time this morning to look at everything the Bible tells us about hospitality, but in our passage this morning from Genesis 18, we find a great example of hospitality in the ancient world. We find Abraham sitting in the door of his tent during the afternoon heat when he sees three men. He jumps up and runs out to meet them, begging them to stop and spend some time with him.

When the strangers agree to stop, Abraham runs to Sarah and has her make some fresh bread while he fixes these strangers Veal Parmesan. Then when it was time for the strangers to leave, Abraham walks with them for a ways to “set them on their way.”

As it turns out, these strangers that Abraham welcomed were angels or messengers from God and so Abraham becomes the model of Jewish hospitality. Over and over again in the Old Testament, particularly in the Law, we find God commanding the Israelites to remember what it was like to be aliens or strangers in Egypt. For example, Exodus 23:9 says, “You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.”

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul shows us that this idea of being foreigners is a spiritual concept, not just physical. Ephesians 2:12 says, “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and

without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

This helps us to understand biblical hospitality. It is closely related to the hospitality that God extends to us. The way we practice true hospitality will be the result of how we understand God’s hospitality towards us. Because of sin, we are separated from God, foreigners. But because of Jesus, God welcomes us and treats us far better than we deserve.

So let me share with you a couple key concepts of biblical hospitality and some practical ways that we can pursue Christian Hospitality in our own lives. First, Christian hospitality, as given to us in the Bible, is a sacred *process* of receiving outsiders and changing them from strangers into guests and from guests to family.

Hospitality is the way that we invite people into our lives so that they can experience Jesus for themselves and hopefully be transformed into followers of Christ. By inviting them to church, we are inviting them into our fellowship so that they will be exposed to the Word of God. But more importantly, when we invite them into our homes, we are inviting them to see Christianity in action. Real hospitality requires us to be involved in people’s lives and that they be involved in ours.

Second, hospitality is not some specialized spiritual gift that only some people possess. Instead, every Christian is called to the ministry of hospitality. In 1 Peter 4:9 we’re told to show hospitality without complaining and in Romans 12:13 we are told to be diligent in welcoming people and showing hospitality.

So what about you? How can you practice biblical hospitality in your own life? Here’s some suggestions. Look for ways to get to know your neighbors, the staff at your doctor’s office, the employees at the grocery store. By intentionally building a relationship with the people you come in contact with on a regular basis, you are practicing hospitality and working to eliminate loneliness, which is an epidemic these days.

Also, food is an important part of hospitality. Look for ways to share meals with people, whether at a restaurant or in your home. When you eat with people there is a kind of bond that is created and it sends the message that you love and value the other person.

Finally, consider joining together with several other believers to practice hospitality together. Last week we talked about getting together to draw closer to Jesus. That seems like a great time to also practice hospitality with one another and to invite others who don’t currently follow Jesus to join you. What you may discover is that the non-threatening environment of good food and good company where they can see Christianity in action will interest them in learning more about Christ.

In a few minutes we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. When we do we are reminded that Jesus is the one who invites us to participate, pointing us to his great heavenly banquet. We learn to practice hospitality by experiencing it here first. My prayer is that you will experience God’s hospitality and then share it with others during the week.

Amen.