

Luke 14.12-14
St Stephens

Oct 10/11, 2009
Weekend Worship

Open Hearts, Open Homes

Comments on the ArBp's Pastoral Letter

- Pitts Court Ruling against the diocese in their property decision.
- Affects only the property of the Diocese, not the parishes
- ArBp's Pastoral Letter
- Standing Comm taking two weeks to pray and think about appeal – Join us! And let me know what you think God's leading is!
- God is in all of these matter, and will lead us through!
- Briefing for the parish early next month

Introduction: 30 Days of Compassion, focusing on a **special mission field** – the one next door to where you live and where you work. We want to talk all month about getting **God's love into our neighborhoods.**

Yesterday we had teams of people **visit all the shops** in the borough, taking fresh cookies and warm greetings to the people who work up and down the streets in our shops... just extending God's care to folks in our community. This week we launch a month long **'Meet Your Neighbors' initiative**, a simple 4 step process of getting to know your neighbors and beginning to pray for them and be kind to them. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Just random acts of kindness all up and down your street! I hope hundreds of us join this 'Meet Your Neighbors' effort that we are starting today. We have a whole list of projects in the weeks ahead outside on our tables.

This weekend we are focusing on **Christian hospitality**. I don't know if you are aware of this but from the beginning to the end **the bible champions hospitality**. It became an important part of life in the ancient world, and is still found in most third world countries. I vividly

remember being **welcomed into simple village homes** in Uganda, where people who had nothing, nothing at all would insist that I be seated with them at a place of honor and would put everything they had in front of me. It was humbling. And moving.

In the pages of the scripture again and again we are told to welcome friends and strangers, neighbors and travelers, missionaries and ministers, into our homes and lives, and to give a special welcome to those who have no welcome at all. I like the word '**Welcome**'.



We put it over our front doors in large letters at St St on purpose – because it says something important about the heart of God to all who enter this place. Christian hospitality is one of the defining marks of the gospel, and **it means welcoming** guests, showing respect for them, giving them an honored place, and taking care of them. In early centuries of the church, Christians became famous across the Roman empire for their '**open hearts and open homes**'.

When Christianity was legalized in the 4th century, the **hospitality movement** began to develop institutions where people could be welcomed and cared for according to their needs. So...

Hospitality was extended to the sick in **hospitals**.

Hospitality was extended to the travelers in **hostels**.

Hospitality was extended to the dying in **hospices**.

These are familiar places of care today, but in the ancient world, no one had ever heard of such things. They were developed by Christians who extended the hospitality of God to their neighbors.

Hospitality is profoundly transformational; it welcomes the stranger,

shelters the traveler, feeds the hungry, comforts the suffering, protects the fearful and brings dignity to the lowly.

Our gospel passage today is one of the provocative things Jesus had to say about hospitality:

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed..."

Luke 14:12-14

Well, Jesus says...

You can invite your **friends**... And they will invite you in return
You can invite the **rich** and **powerful**... And gain advantage
You can invite **those who have no welcome** almost anywhere...
And be like God!

The story of 'Joseph', a guest in our home over Christmas in Madison...

Hitchhiking through over Christmas...

Jewish man, bright, well educated, fallen on hard times, grew up an orphan. Kind of 'out of sorts' with the world

Stayed for a meal and the night – and it stretched out to several days. Long talks about life and God

Came out of nowhere and disappeared into nowhere

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Hebrews 13:2

James sums it up in his own way:

Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight...

James 1:27 (Msg)

The Bible is full of stories of hospitality. One of the most famous happened in the home of Mary and Martha...

The Hospitality of Martha

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house.

Luke 10:38

Martha and her sister Mary lived with their brother Lazarus. They were friends of Jesus when we first meet them, and they heard he was coming to visit them. Martha sprung into action. This is a woman who is 'in charge'; she wanted everything to be right for this guest. She was **the perfect hostess**. The oven was lit. The special food came out. She would make fresh bread! Fish was cleaned and cooked. It was a job, but the occasion was important. She was a whirlwind in the kitchen.

As he arrived, though, her sister **Mary** who had been helping her took off her apron, **walked out of the kitchen** and **sat down at Jesus' feet** (get that picture). Martha was quickly overwhelmed by the tasks of the moment. She picked up her frantic pace, worked harder, while trying to catch some of the conversation in the other room. Luke tells us that...

Martha was distracted with the big dinner she was preparing...

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

Luke 10:40 (Msg)

Finally, it was too much. She was anxious, and then exasperated, and finally **angry... she exploded at her family - and at Jesus!** "Do you not care?" "Tell her to get up and help me!!" Hasn't this happened in your own home? In the middle of that frustrating, embarrassing moment, Jesus speaks up to her...

"Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting

yourself worked up over nothing. Only one thing is essential, and Mary has chosen it – it's the main course, and won't be taken from her."

Luke 10:41-42 (Msg)

The **'main course'** for the evening was being prepared and served, but not in the kitchen by Martha – rather in the living room by Jesus, and Martha was missing it. He had come

not for the entertainment but for the fellowship. He came not so much for food as for friendship.

Not for gossip but for good news.

Martha thought long and hard about his words that night.

The months ahead would be difficult for Martha. Jesus would be driven across the Jordan by the threat of arrest and death. And then her brother, her dear brother **Lazarus was seriously ill.**

Martha must have served him every moment of those days of illness, frantic with worry. The sisters sent word to Jesus:

"Lord, the one you love is sick." John 11:3

But **Jesus didn't come.** And then **Lazarus died.** I think **Martha's world crashed** in those days. What **mattered most** had been **taken away. Death has a way of peeling away the things that don't matter.** How she would give anything for a chance to serve Lazarus and Jesus again!

The last time we see Martha is just a chapter later. **Jesus** had finally **come back** to her home, half a week after Lazarus had died. Do you remember the story? He walked into the tomb and called Lazarus by name, and **he came out!** it was a spectacular, unbelievable, 'too good to be true, too great to be missed' day.

As John 12 opens, a dinner was given in Jesus' honor in Martha's home. Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

There they made him a supper; Martha served... John 12:2

No hint of reproach towards others, or of anger or of undue anxiety;
Jesus was there! Lazarus was there! **That was what mattered!**

Martha had learned the **difference between entertainment and hospitality...**

Entertainment

House is a master
Heart is tied to the house
Important to impress
Only welcome when...

Hospitality...

House is a servant
Heart is tied to the guests
Important to love
Always welcome whenever...

Last Christmas I made a table for Becca,



a large dining room table with leaves. Here I am fitting the leaves to the table before I finished it, working to get it done by Christmas. We had a special hope for this table, and when I got it done, hidden under the table I wrote this dedication...



It says, *"To My Dear Becca, with much love and gratitude for our many years together, and with the hope that the Lord Jesus himself will often join us at this table, blessing friend, family and stranger with his grace and fellowship – and His way of Life. Your Geoff"*

That is the profound thing that happens when you open your heart and open your home and extend a welcome to all in the name of Jesus – you do find that **he himself joins you as guest**, that he himself **becomes the host**, and that he himself **becomes the main course**, feeding all who gather with the good news of his life and his love.

Could our homes become places like that? Where neighbors and strangers – and maybe even 'strange neighbors' – are welcomed with the Love of God in Jesus...!