

*Hospitality: Becoming The People Of God*

If you've been around CPC for any length of time, you'll know that we're in the process of reorganizing our shared life around the idea of discipleship to Jesus. That means that every apprentice or disciple of Jesus organizes their life around two goals. The first is to be present with Jesus in every moment of their living. And the second is to participate with God in what he's doing around the world. These two goals, presence, and participation are how we're trying to reorganize everything we do around here.

For the past two years, we've been exploring different habits and practices that help us towards the goal of presence with Jesus. These practices and habits become what we call a Rule of Life, not rules of life, but a rule of life. And by that, we mean a shared set of commitments and practices that we try to take on that we believe open us up to the work of the Holy Spirit. For the past two years, we've been working on attentiveness to God and renewing the mind, which we've done through the habits of silence and solitude, and Sabbath. We practice renewing the mind through fasting and scripture.

We're moving from these practices of presence to practices of participation. One of the things you see in the life of Jesus is that he had this rhythm in his life in which he would move from retreating away, whether in isolation or with a small group of disciples, to be present to God in a unique way. If you read the gospels, you often hear he pulled away up to the mountainside to pray. He withdrew to the wilderness, where he would commune with God all night. He organized his life around this retreating, but then there was also this other rhythm where he would return to engage in the world around him.

So retreat and return were two sides of the same coin for the life of Jesus, constantly pulling away to be with the Father, yet returning to the ministry and the work that God had for him. So this model of retreat and return or presence and participation is how we try to mirror our lives as followers of Jesus.

The practices of presence are the inward practices; they're the ones that tend to make introverts happy. We love to just sit and sigh. I would be so satisfied with just reading books all day, every day, sitting at home in my library. But my soul would slowly shrivel. As much as it would give life, it would also shrivel. We weren't meant just for the inward moments of introversion.

However, our extroverts are very excited to move towards the second half, in which we move outward and receive life by being with people around us in community and partnering in the active ways of our life, moving towards these outward disciplines. My hope is that you see the need for both of these practices. You may be more drawn towards the first part of this rule of life, towards those inward practices, but you, too,

need the outward practices. Maybe, as we go through this, you're more drawn to the outward practices, and you've been waiting for hospitality and vocation, and that's beautiful. But I hope too that you've seen the need for the inward disciplines.

There's a balance that's needed. Return and retreat and return was the rhythm of Jesus. So we stand at the beginning of that, and all of these disciplines and practices are invitations. They're not the way we change, but they're the way we allow God to change us. Do you see the difference? There are ways we open our lives in silence and solitude. It's not just being quiet for a certain amount of time; although it has an effect, it's being quiet and silent before God in the presence of God that allows room for the Holy Spirit to do the transformative work.

Well, these outward disciplines are similar. They are not the means by which we actually transform the world around us, but rather, they put our lives in the same movement of God. As God is moving throughout the peninsula and out of this area, we are partnering with his presence, opening our lives up to what may be possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So these practices, inward and outward, presence and participation, are the way in which we are trying to follow Jesus in this season. We do not graduate past the top half of this. So it's not like we're done, checked it off, leave it aside, but rather like the practice of scripture, for instance, it is a lifelong commitment to the daily reading of God's word of opening our lives up to what he's communicated through the scriptures.

Today we start the practice of hospitality for the next year, which flows nicely out of our last series. We just came from *Kingdom Allegiance: Faithfulness to Jesus in Our Political Age* because it was a very natural output. We've spent the last three weeks wrestling with what it means to live in a world where people have different opinions, voting patterns, and habits. We've spent a lot of time talking about the hostility and polarization in our culture. I'm not going to rehash that. I don't think anyone would argue that this is the space in which we live.

How do we follow Jesus in that? We've talked some about that, particularly at the political polarization, but now we're looking at this practice of hospitality: what we mean by that, and how we practice it. We practice hospitality in contrast to a world full of hostility, division, and isolation, which we do by cultivating habits of table welcome and evangelism.

Over the next six months, we're going to get to each one of those. But now we're talking about this practice of hospitality in the midst of a hostile world. It was the sociologist Philip Rieff who broke down modern Western culture into three specific phases.

## Pre-Christian Culture

The first is what he called pre-Christian culture, which is exactly how it sounds. Think of England prior to the evangelistic movement, or think of other nations in which they have not had a movement of the Spirit of God. A pre-Christian culture is one in which the primary task of the church is that of introduction. Preaching the gospel begins with sharing Jesus. The task of sharing Jesus is about introducing people, largely for the first time, to who this Jesus person is. That's pre-Christian culture.

## Christianized Culture

The second phase is that of Christian culture, or a better concept might be a Christianized culture, because cultures don't necessarily have souls and can't be saved, but rather in a Christianized culture, there's a sense in which the cultural norms push and pull you towards the way of Jesus. There's an openness to it. Now, it's never purely Christianized or otherwise. It's always secular and pagan ideals mixed in with the thread of Christianity. But in a Christianized culture, the norms naturally move you towards the way of Jesus.

Think of even in the not-too-distant past in which most of America shut down on Sundays. Most stores were closed. It was built out of the Christian idea of Sabbath, and you could sense the culture was naturally in that rhythm. There are other examples of that within our own past, but the norm was that the accepted life would move you toward the way of Jesus. The pre-Christian culture gave way to the Christianized culture. You can imagine what the third category is.

## Post-Christian Culture

It's important to note that in a post-Christian culture, according to Rieff, it is not that we've graduated from the ideals of a Christianized culture. What's fascinating about our modern world is that of the overwhelming influence of Christianity within the world is undeniable. There's a book by the historian Tom Holland called *Dominion*. He's a non-believer who argues that there is no way you can view the modern world without seeing the impenetrable impact of Christianity in the West. He says it had a prolific influence on the world.

A post-Christian world is reacting against the Christianized culture. This is an important distinction because it's not so much that they've tried to move beyond the ideas of the kingdom of God, but rather they've moved beyond that there is a king of the kingdom of God. They're seeking the same ethos, justice, equality, all those beautiful things, but in doing so, they are trying to extract it from the Christian narrative.

A lot of that's for reasons that we may have earned and the way in which we've held our position in culture. As the church, we don't always do that well. What we need to recognize in the post-Christian culture we live in is that the world around us, the culture around us, is living in reaction against the Christian story. This is where the practice of hospitality becomes very important.

In a post-Christian world, there are two responses to the invitation of Jesus. There's either ambivalence, in which when we interact with our coworkers or neighbors, there can be a sense of, "What's good for you is good for you, but what's good for me is good for me." There can be

a distance that grows, not out of real hostility, but just out of a lack of interest. "It has no bearing, no meaning on my life."

The other posture that can stem from a post-Christian culture is that of hostility, which views it not as a net positive but rather as a net negative. It hasn't been that long in our history that Christians were at least viewed as having the moral high ground. We were viewed more as legalists. "Like, how could you all possibly live up to these sorts of ideals? Don't take it so seriously." But now we live in a place where we're viewed in the status quo as a moral net negative as something that the world looks at as holding us back from the progress in which we're supposed to make. "Haven't we moved on and progressed from that archaic thinking?"

The Christian story is viewed with hostility in that it's a negative drag on society, weighing us down. This is a disorienting shift. Even in my short lifetime, this has been a radical, quick move that has left us quite disoriented. But it's because of this context that we have to think of how do we invite people to follow Jesus in this environment.

I heard a pastor, John Tyson, say, "In our post-Christian world, the credibility of our witness is dependent on the quality of our hospitality." This is the main idea of the message today. I'm convinced the church must recover this practice. I want to paint a picture for you, a biblical theology (tracing from Genesis to Revelation), of the concept or theme of hospitality.

This is a practice that the early church used, and it flipped the Roman world upside down. This concept of hospitality is one in which we create space and extend mercy and the grace of Jesus to others around us. I believe it's this hospitality that counters the ambivalence of what's good for you is good for you, what's good for me is good for me because Christian hospitality offers a way to tell a better story.

Those individuals who are ambivalent towards the way of Jesus long for and search for community. Hospitality meets them in that place and welcomes them. It turns the neighbor into a friend and friends into family. It welcomes them in. I believe hospitality, in response to hostility, allows a space in which we undo the pressure and the tension that is latent within our world. It welcomes people in with no agenda other than to love them because that's the people we are. We are people who love. That is the aim of where we are going. Hospitality is the opportunity we have to counter these narratives of ambivalence and hostility.

We define hospitality as creating a space where strangers are welcomed as friends and friends are turned into family. It's simply that. Creating the space is creating the environment and the conditions in which we welcome our neighbors, coworkers, friends, colleagues, or classmates, whoever it is. We create the space. We're strangers. The other, those distant from us, are welcomed as friends, and friends are turned into family. Henry Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out*, has a beautiful chapter on hospitality. He says,

**Our society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion always expecting**

**an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm. But still—that is our vocation: to convert the hostis into a hospes, the enemy into a guest, and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced. Nouwen**

So, the task before us is to practice hospitality in the midst of a hostile world, looking at our friends and neighbors and turning them into the family that we in the family of God experience. We're going to anchor this message in Genesis 18. Then I'm going to walk us through intentionally quickly to give you a barrage of the stream of hospitality that permeates the scriptures.

**The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." Genesis 18:1-5**

See, the opening of the text marks something that we, as the reader, get to know that Abraham appears to not quite know. In verse 1, it says, "The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre." That's the author's way of letting us know the encounter he's about to have is not just three strangers but an encounter with Yahweh, the God of the universe. It would appear, because of Abraham's actions later, that he does not quite know, or at least he's somewhat ambiguous as to who these strangers are. Yet, it doesn't change the way he responds to this opportunity.

Abraham's sitting there at the entrance of the tent. It's hot. He looks up and sees three men are standing nearby. They draw close, and it says that he hurried to the entrance to meet them and bowed low to the ground. Then he says, "If I found favor in your eyes." Notice the way in which Abraham, the host, is displacing the power dynamics of the host and sending it to the guest.

If you have found favor, if you are willing, it's not about coercion; it's not about forcing himself onto the other, but rather, "If I have found favor my lord." This is not the same word when we think of Lord with a capital L of Yahweh. He's not calling them God, but rather Lord, as in the relationship of a servant to a Lord.

"If I have found favor, my lord, do not pass your servant by." And he begins to offer hospitality to these strangers, people he doesn't know. In this story, we're going to see three things about hospitality that I want to take with us.

### **Offers Humble Welcome**

The first is when we see Abraham offering a humble welcome. Abraham was a man of means. It says here he had cattle, he had servants, he had means around him, and yet, when he encounters the stranger, he takes the posture and actually calls himself a servant. He doesn't allow that differential of his stature and great standing to be a barrier to the other, but rather when he sees them, he takes the posture of servant. He humbles himself before these guests.

It's the display of hospitality that was an attempt to also circumvent any perception of tension between the two. Hospitality in the ancient world was a common practice. It's been industrialized in the modern world, where we could land in some city randomly in the middle of nowhere and probably find some expression of the hospitality industry. There is probably a hotel or motel somewhere where one could take residence and find a space to stay for the night. But that infrastructure wasn't there in the ancient world. And sojourners, like these three men, were left to the hospitality of others. So it was common practice.

Another part of the practice was also, as you are Abraham, watching three men walk up, making sure they are not an enemy. Are they someone who's out to get their cattle, the servants, whatever it is? And, so, hospitality was also this way to diffuse the tension. It was to invite them in and welcome the other in such a way that said, "You are welcome here." So Abraham begins with humble welcome.

It's a good lesson because the assumption in our world is often that strangers are potential danger. It's up to them to disprove it before we extend hospitality. We live with a suspicion about others. In a little while I'm going to go to the airport. I'm flying to a conference in Portland, and the dynamics at an airport are that we tend to keep a close eye on our luggage. I'm worried someone out there must be ready to get my stuff. We live with a suspicion. Our heart's desire may be set towards helping others and feeding the hungry and visiting the prisoner, but yet, our consciousness and our imagination have been shaped in such a way to view the other, not as a potential friend and or family, but as someone to be suspicious of.

Abraham looks out on the "other" and says, let's just circumvent all that. Let's offer humble welcome. See, humble welcome doesn't mean flippancy or irresponsibility about how we engage with the world, but it does mean we begin to challenge the preconceived filters that hinder us from seeing the "other" as a potential family member of God. Abraham engages in this humble welcome, taking the posture of a servant, but it's more than just a posture, although that's important.

### **Practical Care**

The second aspect of hospitality we learned from Abraham is that of practical care. These travelers were probably road-weary. I don't know where they've been coming from, but they were probably hungry and thirsty. Abraham springs into action, and he says, "Let me draw water to wash your feet." They didn't have highways. They're walking around in Birkenstocks and it's dusty and dirty. So, I would imagine their feet were not great.

The practice of offering water was a sign of invitation. “You’re welcome here; come into the home.” He offers that, and he offers rest. He provides a shady spot in the heat of the day for them to take comfort and rest and offers them a meal. They were hungry. They need some sustenance. Abraham not only takes the posture towards the “other” to welcome them in, but he then moves that into action and offers practical care. Let’s see the way he does this.

**So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.” Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. Genesis 18:6-8**

It isn’t just that he offered a meal, which would have been somewhat normal. But rather, Abraham goes above and beyond.

### Lavish Embrace

The third aspect of hospitality is what I call lavish embrace. Notice that he goes to his herd and slaughters the choicest calf. This would have been an expression of care, one that would have cost him both time and resources. He slaughters the choicest calf, brings fresh baked bread, brings milk and curds and lays out this feast before the “other.” He doesn’t hold back, but rather, he lavishly pours out a meal for them as an extension of his hospitality.

It’s the lavish embrace of these guests that communicates care and attention to them. It turns potential strangers or potential enemies into friends and friends into family—humble welcome, practical care, and lavish embrace.

That second text you heard from, Hebrews, talks about this particular encounter. To me, that’s startling because that means this story in Genesis 18 had such resonance with the people of God that it echoed for centuries to the point where, in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews is writing and riffing off this story. In Hebrews 13, it says, “*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it*” (vv. 1-2). It’s the author of Hebrews who looks back on this story and recognizes those three guests. They weren’t just typical, ordinary guests, but rather they were entertaining angels. They were showing hospitality, unaware of the very presence and manifestation of God right in front of them.

This is something we should keep in mind. Often, we look with suspicion at others, but what if we had the posture to wonder if the very presence of God is with this individual? What if the person we crossed paths with was the one we typically cross the street to avoid or the one to which we are embarrassed to pull our car up next to? We drive into our garage and wait to get out until the door is shut, just to be sure no one could possibly see us.

What if we had the posture that the neighbor across the street could be an angel in which we have the opportunity to encounter? Have we considered the way that would challenge our perspective? Have we considered the way that viewing others through this lens might transform our hearts even more so than the “other’s” heart?

The problem is that when we think of the word hospitality, images come to mind of nice place settings, hand-stitched doilies, and Martha Stewart in Town and Country. We think of cute placemats with expensive plateware. None of that’s bad. Those are genuine expressions of hospitality, but I would suggest that the hospitality industry has had a second-order effect on our minds and imaginations, which views hospitality more through the lens of entertainment than the welcome of others. Christine Pohl, in her beautiful book, *Making Room*, says,

**Today, most understandings of hospitality have a minimal moral component—hospitality is a nice extra if we have the time or the resources, but we rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity. Pohl**

Does that come to mind when you think of hospitality? Does that come to mind when you think of welcoming the other? Theologian Josh Jipp writes in his book *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*:

**The God of the Christian scriptures is a God of hospitality, a God who extends hospitality to his people and who requires that his people embody hospitality to others. Stated simply, God’s hospitality to us is the basis of our hospitality to one another. God’s relationship to his people is fundamentally an act of hospitality to strangers, as God makes space for “the other,” for his people, by inviting humanity into relationship with him. This experience of God’s hospitality is at the very heart of the church’s identity. We are God’s guests and friends... hospitality to strangers is an inextricable component of the identity of the church and its vocation. Joshua Jipp**

Ultimately, we are called to hospitality because we were once strangers to God. The New Testament teaches we were more than just strangers; we were enemies of God, with our lives aimed against God. Yet the very core understanding of God is one of hospitality to us. He, in fact, has welcomed the stranger. He, in fact, has welcomed those distant from us. Our expression of hospitality is built on nothing else than the hospitality that God has shown to us. And we should be very cautious to not freely extend what God has freely extended to ourselves.

Let’s dig into the definition of hospitality one more time, particularly through the biblical origins of it. In Greek, the word is *philoxenia*. And this is one of the best ways to define it because it’s pretty simple. *Philoxenia* is the combination of two words. The first is the word *philo*, which is where we get family, brotherly, sisterly love. It’s the same root word that’s in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. *Philo* is then mixed with the word *xenos*. Now you are probably unfortunately more familiar with *xenos* from the phrase xenophobia, which is the fear of the “other.”

The biblical understanding of hospitality is *philo* and *xenos*, which isn't the fear of the other, but rather the love of the other. It's this concept of the love of the other that is laced throughout the scriptures. Let me give you a little bit of a fire hose at how you see this theme throughout the scriptures. Let's begin in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 18, you see clear examples of the centrality of hospitality in Abraham's story. That's the story we just read. Fast forward to Joshua 2. In Joshua 2, you have the story of Rahab, the prostitute, who shows immense hospitality to the messengers of God, helps in their aid, and saves them from the captivity by the people in Jericho. In 1 Kings 17-18, you see Elijah, the prophet, receives hospitality from the Zarephath widow. In 2 Kings 4, you see Elisha is hosted by a Shunammite woman. In Leviticus 19:34, you see explicitly the command, "*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God*" (v. 34). Notice you were the outsider and God welcomed you as the insider.

In Deuteronomy 10, you see the echo of that same commandment. Fast forward, you see this in the life of the church, which we have already talked about. In Exodus 23:9, "*Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt*" (v. 9). Leviticus 25:23, you were strangers and sojourners. Let's fast forward to the New Testament.

**Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your 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. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Luke 14:12-14**

Matthew 25, Jesus teaching on hospitality becomes the dividing line between those who, at the judgment of God, are ushered into the kingdom and those who are ushered out. This one's a difficult one we'll get to later, but he says this, "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,*" (v. 35). Luke 10:29-37, you see the parable of the good Samaritan, which is ultimately a parable about hospitality and love. In a beautiful Jesus way, the traditional enemy, the Samaritan, is actually the hero of the story who offers hospitality to what would have been his bitter enemy and rival. He looks at the religious folk and says, "Who's the hero of the story?" It was startling and shocking to them.

Matthew 5:39-44, you see Jesus' teaching on enemy love. This is the quintessential highest form of hospitality in which you offer it to the very person you deem an enemy. The apostles are constantly exhorting the church to show hospitality to strangers. Romans 12:13, share with the Lord's people who are in need, practice hospitality. Romans 15:7, accept or welcome one another, just as Jesus Christ accepted or welcomed you. Hebrews 13:2, what we just talked about. 1 Timothy 3:2, "*Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*" (v. 2). I've heard of pastors

and leaders falling for a lot of things, but I've yet to hear a story of one who did not welcome a neighbor into their house and was dismissed. Yet it's the qualification of an elder.

Titus 1:8. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good. 1 Timothy 5:10. And it is well known, speaking of an individual within the church, for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. The New Testament church embodied this. Romans 16:23, Paul writes about a specific individual, Gaius, whose hospitality the whole church enjoyed

Then fast forward to the end of the text in Revelation 19:9, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb, where all nations, people from every country, nation, and tongue are gathered around a banquet feast because it is the hospitality and the welcome of God, which is where all of this is moving.

Now, take a breath. Hospitality is at the very heart of God, the identity of God himself. The idea of God being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this triune God, three different beings all wrapped up into one at the core of his existence in what John says God is love, is the offer of hospitality. For these three beings to be in existence with one another, they are constantly showing love and care and welcome to the other without pretense or hierarchy, but rather in a communal of self-giving love. The very being of God is hospitality.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to look at what this looks like on the ground. I believe the call and command before us is to use a phrase from Rosario Butterfield—be radically, ordinarily hospitable. I believe the future of the church is not in bigger services, greater programs, or better sermons, but rather it's in the people of God recovering the practice of radically ordinary hospitality.

Rosario Butterfield wrote in a beautiful book called *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, which, by the way, the title alone is worth the price of the book, but it's a great story in which she moved from someone very much on the outside to the inside of the family of God through the expression of hospitality. Prior to coming to faith, she was a radical left, liberal lesbian professor at Syracuse University, whose work was as a lesbian activist in postmodern feminist studies. Not exactly the prime candidate, we'd think, for following Jesus.

But as her story goes, she was writing about the Promise Keepers movement. A men's movement that was traveling throughout the country. If you don't remember, it was a men's rally in which men would gather, and it was landing in a city near her. So she, in that posture, wrote a protest article about Promise Keepers. She believed it was against everything she held to be true. It was offensive and disruptive. So, she was doing everything in her power to disrupt this event.

When she wrote this protest article and the perceived bigotry and evil of the Christian movement, assuming the absolute worst in the church as a menace to society, she received all sorts of feedback. So, as the hate mail began to roll in, she would read it all, but she came across one piece of hate mail from one of her readers. As she was reading it, she noticed

something different about the tone of this letter. She claimed it was the most loving hate mail she'd ever read.

The letter came from a local Presbyterian pastor. He took her seriously, took her ideas seriously, and dignified who she was. The end of the letter had some critiques and said, "I know we have some differences here, but I'd love to have you over for dinner. I want you to read what she said after the dinner. She's a good writer, so I thought instead of summarizing, I would just read her words directly. Right before this, she had signed a book deal and was about to write an anti-Christian book. As a good academic, she thought she needed some primary sources, so she accepted the invitation for dinner.

**The task at hand was daunting, which is why I sat in my truck so long, not quite ready to knock on the front door of this house and walk across its threshold. Somehow, I would have to emerge from this meal understanding the oppressive logic that elevated a dead book [the Bible] above the desires of good people. I would have to do so without having an emotional breakdown. To be hated for who you are carries an insidious evil or violence, and I had been on the receiving end of that before with Christians. Dealing with Christians was toxic work. Like deep sea diving, you could stay down there only for so long before the long-term consequences took hold. I wanted to learn why Christians hated me so much but maintain with integrity my point of view.**

The prospect made me sick to my stomach. I breathe hard and hoisted myself out of the truck, nursing a tender hamstring from my morning run. I waded through the unusually thick July humidity in the front door and knocked. The threshold of their life was like none other. The threshold to their life brought me to the foot of the cross.

Nothing about that night unfolded according to my confident script. Nothing happened in the way I expected. Not that night or the years after or the hundreds of meals or the long nights of Psalm singing and prayers as other believers from the church and university walked through the door of this house as if no door was there. Nothing prepared me for the openness and the truth. Nothing prepared me for the unstoppable gospel and for the love of Jesus made manifest by the daily practices of hospitality undertaken in this one simple Christian home. The Christian home became my two-year refuge and way station. Long before I ever walked through the doors of the church, the Smith home was the place where I wrestled with the Bible, with the reality that Jesus is who he says he is. [Radically ordinary hospitality.]

She'd go on to write about some of the unique ways they expressed that. This pastor knew that she was a vegetarian. She believed the impact of the meat industry on the climate was detrimental, so they served her a vegetarian meal. She'd written before about the effects of something like air conditioning on the world, and so they turned it off and set out fans. Simple acts of hospitality that dignified the "other," what was perceived as the enemy. And yet the daily practice of hospitality from this Presbyterian pastor transformed the entire trajectory of her life. She didn't just hear the gospel; she felt it and experienced it. A little bit later, she says,

Christians have a powerful history of building schools and hospitals of showing up during natural disasters to offer water and food and shelter and medicine. We have that history. But do we have the daily witness of Christian neighboring? Our post-Christian neighbors need to hear and see and taste and feel authentic Christianity, hospitality spreading from every Christian home that includes neighbors in prayer, food, friendship, childcare, dog walking, and all the daily matters upon which friendships are built. Butterfield

Her life's work is about transition. Once she found welcome in the LGBTQ community, who she frankly says did it far better than the church, until this pastor expressed hospitality and welcome, and engaged with her recognizing the dignity of her story. He took her seriously, wasn't coercive, didn't project or didn't force his way onto her, but simply said, "Let's eat a meal together." In a post-Christian world, the credibility of our witness depends on the quality of our hospitality. Church, what could the peninsula look like if we were marked by the radical, ordinary hospitality that has been part and parcel of the people of God for centuries?

My prayer for us in this coming year is that God would use us as the ones who've received unspeakable hospitality from God to extend that offer to our neighbors, coworkers, colleagues, and whoever it is that has been in our sphere of influence. May we never forget that on the cross, Jesus demonstrated that cosmic act of welcome. Radical, ordinary hospitality is both the mark on our life and the one that we offer to the world.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1487FC