

Victory of the Lamb – November 18, 2018 Imitating God: Living Generously

Hebrews 13:1-3 The Gospel Comes With The House Key – Pastor Bill Limmer

Somewhere around 5:00 every Sunday morning Cindy leaves her house and begins making her way here. When she arrives often Tim is here already too. They chit chat make coffee and began the final Victory Café preparations so that when you come in the doors you may have a breakfast feast free of charge. Everything from cookies to fruit, from donuts to egg bake, sausages to sandwiches. One of our confirmation students shared this perspective with me: “the cafe have the best sandwiches.” When people come to worship here for the first time if they have checked us out online first, they are blown away that breakfast is served with a smile. Welcome to Victory. Welcome home. Welcome to hospitality.

Often the reality is different outside the ministry center doors. We live in an US vs. THEM society that often stain us and the way we think and act. People are judged as the haves or the have nots. There are insiders vs. outsiders. There are rivals, political rivals, sports rivals, community rivals, relationships rivals, sometimes even church rivals. There are the others. People are rejected because they are them and not us. There is a bias. And today the us vs. them mentality leads people to remove empathy and resources from the outsiders. But this is not the value of Jesus Christ.

Today we are under our theme: Imitating God: Living Generously. And we are going to see that God is generous, far more generous than you or I thought when it comes to hospitality. I am going to say a phrase that I bet at least 99% of never put together before: **hospitality is a Jesus attitude and action.**

How would you define hospitality? Usually we define hospitality in one of three ways. Way one: Luxury. A few years back I went to the Oneida Country Club in Green Bay for a Christmas Dinner celebration. The room lights were dim so that the lights on the numerous Christmas trees really stood out. There were white table cloths, a million spoons of the table, huge menus, courteous wait staff, multiple courses with pallet cleansers in between. We often think of hospitality as luxurious.

A second way that we think of hospitality is someone who has the gift of hospitality and we walk into their home and the weight of the world is just lifted off our shoulders. We can't explain it, it is just an aura that comes from their gift of hospitality.

A third way is someone who has tons of social energy, the kind of people who make us feel either a dizzy or guilty because we like to go home and sit still after a day of performance. But here is how the ancient book known as the Bible defines hospitality: It is two words brought together love and strangers. It is the love of the outsider, the foreigner, the different, the stranger. One author described hospitality this way: the act or process of changing of the identity of a stranger to that of a guest. Another speaker said that hospitality to turning others into one another. Victory and our individual heart's are to be a safe and welcoming place where strangers become friends, and outsiders become belongers.

I want to drill down a little bit more on Biblical hospitality right now because salvation is dependent on the hospitality of God. took us from being on the outside to being on the inside: 1 Corinthians 2:14 **The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.** Spiritually speaking our grades don't add up. We didn't make it into the ivy League Schools, let alone heaven. But God takes and aces the test for us and gives us the grade and welcome us to heaven. One

last one: Romans 5:8 **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** We were disconnected from relationship, detached from God, on the outside of the Garden, vulnerable in every way. God's love didn't remove his empathy or resources from us. In fact, he gave us his very best, so that our identity is changed from condemned sinner to saved saint. God in his hospitality makes strangers into sons and daughters, heirs of eternal life, and he pours his resources on us, We didn't stand a chance of making it and God welcomed us home through Jesus.. Here is another way: Ephesians 2:4 **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.** We were outside of life and God made us alive.

Christians today often read the Bible as if they were the Jews in the Old Testament, that is God's chosen people. Those of us who are Christians, will read the story of David and Goliath and associate with David and not the Philistine giant. But actually, in the narrative we are the Philistines of the Old Testament, the Baal worshippers, the one who were without hope and without God. But then Jesus comes on to the scene and embrace the outsider, the foreigner, the stranger, the marginalized, the vulnerable, and with loving warmth welcomes people to the inside. This is a Biblical theme. For example: Jesus meets a leper who is in desperate need of healing. Luke 5:13 **Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.** Do you know the plight of the lepers? If someone came within a certain distance of a leper, they had to yell out, Unclean! Unclean! How's that for wrecking self-esteem? They had to yell unclean because their disease was contagious and fatal. They had to leave their family, friends, jobs, security, everything. And move into a leper colony and live away their family and friends until they finally died alone. Did you see what Jesus did in the passage. He welcomed the unwelcome, the unwelcomable. He wasn't afraid of being infected by the man, he touched the man. He loved the stranger, the one different, the one diseased, disfigured, the one who looked, different, the one on the outside. Jesus saw someone in need of love. And so Jesus in love welcomed him.

On a scale of 1-10 Jesus was a ten when it came to hospitality, loving those who were different, maligned, disadvantaged, needy. What would you score yourself? I'm not asking you how you did that one time, I'm talking cumulative scoring of your everyday life. You know what my cumulative score is – F.

Hebrews 13:1-2 **Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.** Show hospitality to those on the inside. You know Christians are notoriously needy. You know how I know right? Because I am needy. I saw this meme this past week. It said Love difficult people. You are a difficult person. The Bible is the lifeline of good news about Jesus. What do you think God thinks about you? Do you think he is saying, "Oh boy, here we go again." Or "I am not going to answer that call right now." God says, "so glad you came. Is that all you want me to do for you. This passage is talking about how we treat those who are like us. Verse two talks about those who are different than us.

² **Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.** Welcome to the outsider giving them a new identity, just as God has given us a new identity free of performance and personality. Growing up our neighbors had our house key and we had theirs. We were welcome and they were welcome anytime. The gospel comes with a house key for the stranger. I told you, you wee on the inside. Jesus gives you a house key to his heart and to heaven by grace through faith. I can't tell you how many times, and you have heard it already in

this series of teaching where I have said, and it's true, you will never look into the eyes of anyone that Jesus didn't die for. But this is also true, God comes in disguises too. Jesus said, Matthew 25:35-40 **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,** ³⁶ **I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.**³⁷ **“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’** ³⁸ **When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’** ³⁹ **When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**⁴⁰ **“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’** Jesus says when you see the ragged ones, the hurting ones, the mistake ridden ones, the sick ones, the lost ones, the hungry ones, the stoned ones, the down and out ones, those down on their luck ones, the imprisoned ones, the homeless ones, you see me. Welcome the other. See God's image in the eyes of everyone you meet. Jesus is friend of those on the outside. Jesus the great High Priest made intercession for us on the cross. 1 John 2:2 **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** The cross welcomes the child of wrath and makes them a child of God, the broken into the comforted, the condemned into the saved, the dirty into the cleaned, the enemy into an ally, the failure into the finest, the lost into the found, the ragged into the received, the sick into the healthy, the sinner into a saint, the unlovable into the loved, the wicked into a friend. Jesus welcomes you home. Knowing that you are welcomed, who is Jesus asking you to welcome home? To whom are you going to give the house keys of heaven?