

## More than Coffee and Cookies

[Romans 6:12-23](#)

[Matthew 10:40-42](#)

The Sunday before last, we heard that Jesus sent his disciples out on a mission journey with the instructions “proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.” Then last week we heard the continuation of his charge to the disciples where he told them that his teaching was controversial and would lead to divisions among people. Today’s gospel reading is the conclusion.

Jesus is telling them that they are his representatives and that whoever receives them will be receiving him. Even if someone only gives a disciple a cup of water, they are still connecting with Jesus. Of course in the desert regions, a cup of cold water is a vital and life-giving gift. Hospitality was highly valued in the desert because it could mean the difference between life and death for a traveler. Hospitality is highly valued in our faith tradition because God is hospitable and because we have vowed to seek and serve Christ in all comers.

In his Rule, St Benedict said, “All guests to the monastery should be welcomed as Christ because he will say, “I was a stranger and you took me in.” All guests should be welcomed as Christ. That I think means a lot more than offering coffee and cookies. Marjorie Thompson, who wrote the book Soul Feast that some of us have been reading together on Tuesday mornings says “Hospitality means receiving the other, from the heart, into my own dwelling place.” Hospitality means receiving the other from the heart.

Jesus said “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” When we receive another from the heart, we are welcoming Christ.

Hospitality always begins with our God who is the ultimate host. God’s first gift of hospitality is all around us in Creation. As best we can understand it, God’s longing for connection and communion led to the great act of creating the universe. On this planet God created and continues to create an environment which sustains life for all beings and in which we can learn about God’s love. This is a lot more than coffee and cookies.

God’s hospitality receives us whom she created into her own dwelling place, into her heart. In this amazing world, God offers us all we need to live in harmony and in communion with the Trinity. But we messed up. And in the last fifty years we have really messed up so that now our very existence is at stake. Climate change threatens life as we know it. We have taken God’s hospitality and thrown it back in her face.

But all is not lost.

All is not lost because God has not changed. God continues to love us unconditionally. God continues to offer us hospitality. The question is what we do with that. Will we look for ways to offer cold water to our world? Will we look for ways not only to have a zero impact in our own little area but also to help others reduce their emissions and support those whose lives have become unmanageable because of environmental destruction?

Living here in Los Osos we are largely buffered from the changes taking place. We have plentiful food and just about enough water. We live in beauty which has not yet been badly decimated by fire or flood. We have very little pollution. I wonder whether it is a coincidence that this land was sold only to white people. In the title deed to my home it states that it may only be sold to white people. There is a later amendment that changes that. But that was the intention, that this would be a place of beauty reserved for whites.

God's hospitality is not biased by color of skin or ethnic origin. God's hospitality extends to all of us whether we are native Californians, or whether our families came from Europe, Japan, Mexico or were brought here as slaves. God's hospitality extends to all and as followers of Jesus we are sent out to receive and extend hospitality to all beings.

When our planet home becomes inhospitable because of our action or inaction, that my friends is sin.

Sin is often slippery and difficult to confront. Sin is systemic racism and systemic environmental destruction. Sin is our failure to tackle these problems. Sin is not just what we do individually but the whole system which tries to keep God's free gifts for one group while excluding others. That's why I call it the sin matrix – we are enmeshed in a system which supports oppression.

The second great act of divine hospitality is the incarnation in which God came in person to restore us to the communion God intends. In Christ we are made a New Creation. Again, this is a lot more than coffee and cookies. God's hospitality offers us a whole new life. God's hospitality enables us to step outside the sin matrix and to see it for what it is. God's hospitality empowers us to change.

Because God came in Jesus to heal us of our wounds, to tend to us like the Good Samaritan, drawing us into God's heart.

Imagine Jesus arms stretched out on the cross in a great sign of God's forgiving welcome, God's incredible hospitality. However badly we have behaved, however much we have tried to destroy God's gift and have trashed the home God gave us, we are still welcome. God's hospitality receives and welcomes us whom he created into his own dwelling place, into his heart.

So what then are we to do?

In one sense we need do nothing but accept the grace that God has given us – the hospitality of creation, incarnation, cross and resurrection. Accept it with joy and with praise and with thanks.

Accept that we are forgiven and made new, given new lives in Christ and rejoice in our dwelling within God's heart.

But yes there's more. In the epistle reading we heard Paul explaining that in the old life we were enslaved to sin but in the new life we are enslaved to God. We could wish that he had used different language. But what he's saying is that just as we were trapped in the sin matrix, now we are enrolled in the opposite – the reign of God – and in place of systemic oppression we have become part of the answer – systemic love.

We are the children of an unconditionally loving, amazingly hospitable God and so we get to practice radical hospitality. Radical hospitality which means receiving the other, from the heart, into our own dwelling place. Which means sharing power as well as opening ourselves in humility to receive and welcome the other.

Hospitality is always a two-way street. It is offered and it is accepted. Sometimes we are too proud to offer it, and sometimes we are too proud to accept it. Only a truly humble heart can dare to open to another who is different from us. Only a truly humble heart can accept God's gift of unconditional love and share it.

The more we accept the hospitality of God, the more we can offer that hospitality to others. The more that we know we are forgiven and deeply loved, the more we can allow others to be who they truly are – beloved children of God – and can invite them into the dwelling place of our hearts without fear.

And there we find that we are all one, we are all one in Christ, God's beloved children. So my friends, let us not be afraid to be hospitable. Let us open our hearts, the dwelling places of our lives, to all those around us. Amen.