

"Hosting in a Strange Land"

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Please Note: These are notes of a dynamic sermon rather than an academic research paper.

Elizabeth Bryant who died last week - all were welcomed, all the time;

She was an amazing cook;

Deb shared how she got all the white kids on the block to really like collared greens.

she made extra, so you could bring a friend home any time.

Liz knew something about hospitality.

Today we look at hospitality as a way to tie into the sacred and connect to God.

PRAYER

Deuteronomy 10:19:

"You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

When there was a famine in land of Canaan,

the people who were to become the Israelites went down to Egypt.

In Egypt they found Joseph, you know with the technicolor coat,

and he made sure his family fleeing famine had food and shelter in Egypt.

Over the next few generations the Israelites lived well with the Egyptians

Then the Egyptians got scared and enslaved them.

Under the heat of slavery the people rose up and fled to the Promised Land.

When they got to the Promised Land,

God said -

Now you remember what it was like to be a stranger in a strange land,

so when a stranger comes to you,

you love them - give them food and shelter and do not enslave them.

When the climate began to shift, droughts became more severe.
A drought came on Syria, the land just north of Canaan,
The farmers could not farm their land and people crowded the
cities in search of food,
In the crowded cities civil unrest grew.
The modern-day pharaoh was afraid;
he crushed down on the people,
the people rose up,
but the rebels were just as violent as the dictator.
Under the heat of civil war and famine, the people fled from their
homeland.
People, hundreds of thousands of people, crowded bus stops,
flooded highways, built rafts,
did whatever they could to escape death in their
homeland.

Our scriptures and our faith tradition are clear about what we as
Christians are called to do.

The National Council of Church, the World Council of Church, the
UCC and the pope:
have all issued various statements calling on the need to provide
hospitality to the refugees.

Churches throughout Europe are literally opening their doors -
providing basic needs and supplies to refugees.

One church I heard about on NPR bought trailers to house refugees.
Church World Service already has long-standing partnerships that
not only addresses emergency needs, but look to lessen the root causes of
migration.

Churches are acting because the mandate of our faith is crystal
clear.

Hebrew 13:2: [letter to the early Christians]

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Many of us can't help but ask...

Yes they might be angels,
but what if those strangers are terrorists?
Yes they might be angels,

but what if those strangers take our jobs?
Yes they might be angels,
but what if those strangers overburden our already struggling social
service net?

On some level these are questions about economics and security,
but at their root is fear.

Fear that somehow if we practice hospitality we will get hurt:
either physically or economically.

This is not the time or place to hammer through differing economic
views,
nor do we need to delve into the long history of places and situations
that bring refugees to our doors.

What we can do is look at how our faith tradition helps us with the fears
associated with practicing hospitality.

Hebrew13:2:

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Who knows what story the author is referring to in this letter?

- Abraham and Sarah welcome three strangers to their tent.

Turns out those strangers were angels bringing the couple a message
from God.

If we approach our hospitality with the hope of seeing angels,
many of our economic and social fears will be addressed.

Let's say we decide as a church family to host a refugee family in the
Woodward House next door.

Of course, the refugees would go through the intense screening process of
the US State Department.

If we partnered with Church World Service or other Humanitarian
organization,

the refugee family would also be connected and known by social
workers in the place they are traveling from.

Even if such screening happens, we might still be afraid.
we might still need to see refugees as potential angels.

So, if we welcome these refugees as potential angels with a message from God,

what might that welcome look like?

Maybe we would open wide our arms:

greeting them with food and shelter and even teddy bears -
much in the way Germany has done.

Providing food and housing is a basic level of hospitality.

[You go to a hotel and expect such basic amenities.

You visit a friend or family member and expect such care.

Such care is simply acknowledging the value of another person's life.]

If we see these refugees as angels,

we see them not simply as people to help,

but people with gifts to share.

we can build real relationships of mutuality:

relationships where we are not serving them,

but relationships where we learn from them and them from

us.

Perhaps we learn a new song or a new prayer,

or a new recipe or a new way to organize church.

[a special Syrian food]

Some of what we learn we will love,

some we will raise an eyebrow at,

and some we will have no interest in embracing.

If we see these refugees as angels,

we may embrace new prayers or songs or recipes,

because that's what good hosts do.

we welcome people as they are and celebrate the different gifts they bring.

we embrace the differences because we know we are all God's children,

and the way we have always done it is not necessarily better than another way brought to us by a stranger in a strange

land.

[we learn to love that weird new dish the way you learn to like broccoli]

If we see these refugees as angels,
and embrace the gifts they bring,
we can build relationships where the "us" and the "them" fall away,
and we become one in Christ.

When we become one in Christ,
there is no longer a "they" stealing jobs
nor is there a "they" burdening our society.
Instead, there are new friends and new faith partners
that enrich and enliven our community in ways we can only begin to
imagine.

When we become one in Christ,
our new members become active in the community:
they enrich East Hartford with cultures and new ways of being,
they volunteer and share their gifts,
perhaps they start a business that provides more jobs,
perhaps they raise faithful children who know this as a home of
generosity and opportunity.

Maybe these strangers come from Syria, or Jamaica, or Hartford, or from
across the street.

If we welcome them as angels,
we may find that instead of terrorists,
we find allies that will stand up for the community that
embraced them in love.

Even more importantly,
we may touch the divine and see the face of God.

Mark 9:37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcome me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

We welcome others - refugees, strangers, addicts, and orphans
not simply because the Bible said so.

We practice hospitality because it ties us to the divine.

In welcoming the stranger, we welcome divine messengers, angels.
In learning what the world looks like through a different pair of
eyes,

we can see a different view of God.

Migrant on the border of Nogales:

soup kitchen run by Christian nuns, food

a man who failed to cross the border -

he had no shoe laces nor much of anything except the shirt on his back.

he did have a mini pocket altar,

popular in central america.

he told me, through broken english, about his church.

his sunday school and his children.

his face glowed so much that,

you might not guess that all hopes for a future had been slashed,

he told me about his faith.

and I learned something about my own.

I only spoke with this man for 10 minutes,

but I wonder what would have happened if we had more time.

what I might have learned from a man whose faith had

given his courage to seek a chance at life,

a faith that had literally carried him through the desert,

a faith that had him glowing in what looked like rubble.

My hope is that I do get another chance to meet an angel.

Maybe that angel is a refugee, maybe a stranger on the street,
maybe a friend

maybe a family member.

My hope is that I can practice a radical hospitality that creates

space for a mutual relationship of learning and care,

a relationship where the barriers and the walls that separate us
come down.

May we all find ways to entertain and welcome angels into our midsts.

Amen.