

Hospitality in an Alienated World, Part 1

I would like to argue that our modern Westernized concept of hospitality is severely limited. How often do we only associate hospitality with room service, decor, cleanliness, the appearance of a meal, polite friends and family who frequent our tables and living rooms? We think hospitality is only best served to people we already know, or to those who we *think* share our same ideas on issues such as politics and religion. It is interesting to note, that those isolated ideas of hospitality starkly contrast the way in which the New Testament approaches the subject. Hospitality in the New Testament has a much richer tapestry as it emphasizes the sharing of one's resources and time to society's fringe. To have been on the fringe could have meant a diverse amount of things in New Testament times, so I will sum it up as someone who experienced the loss, separation, or breakdown of meaningful family and community. It is in the New Testament where we see orphans, widows, strangers, travellers, and the poor all sharing life together, and *that* is a rich picture of hospitality in an alienated world!

JESUS AS HOST TO AN ALIENATED WORLD

We see Jesus, one like Yahweh and the prophets before Him, who invited an alienated world to break bread with Him (Exodus 16, 2 Kings 4:42-44, Mark 8: 1-10). It was in those times of eating and togetherness that Jesus began to reveal His identity and mission. For instance, in the feeding of the 5 000, Jesus was moved with compassion by what He saw among the multitude: They were representatives of a larger alienated world in their own unique setting – sheep without a shepherd, students without a teacher, children without food - *How many of us can identify with having felt at least one of those things at some point in time?* - Jesus fulfilled the needs of the multitude by being their shepherd, servant, teacher, and miraculous source of provision (Mark 6:30-44., Drane, 1999, 65).

The hospitality and miracles I see of Jesus in the Mark 6 account are linked without question! Jesus' titles of Son of Man and Son of God really do go hand in hand – first to emphasize His nature as human, the second to emphasize His nature as divine. In light of that, it is difficult to deny: In an alienated world, Jesus is the great host and shepherd of people!

JESUS AS GUEST AMONG AN ALIENATED WORLD

We don't have to read far into the book of Matthew to learn that it was the "the others" who extended their hand and pulled out their chair for Jesus. And by "the others" I am referring to those on the fringe of society – the alienated and marginalized. It was easy for Jesus to consider Himself one among "them" and of "those people" because He too had experienced rejection (Matthew 6:1-6). Can you see through reading your Bible that Jesus chose to associate well with people who were perhaps much like you and me – people who listen to one another's ideas, stories, burdens, and hopes, people who share in one another's meals, people who don't just talk for the sake of being heard, people who delight in showing affection (Matthew 2:13-17, Mark 5:21-43)?

Jesus continues to extend Himself in a similar manner after His resurrection, as a guest to any and all who will receive Him (Revelation 3:20). Even in Jesus' glory, He will align Himself with "them" and "those", knowing them, loving them, calling them His own:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the Holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory... the King will say to those on His right hand 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'... 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren,

you did it to Me.’ (Matthew 25: 31-40).

Those who were alienated from the tables of the religious and social elite became the host of Jesus, who in turn gives to them their inheritance forever.

CHRISTIANS AS HOSTS OF ONE ANOTHER:

Simply saying “a Christian’s righteous behaviour includes hospitality” sounds mechanical, does it not? But when such ideas are couched in expressions of love I have a difficult time ignoring them. For example, the book of Acts talks about the breaking of bread from house to house in order to share a meal with other believers (Wagner, 2008, 77). Specifically, Acts 2 speaks of Christian hospitality set in the context of love for God and one another:

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47).

Are you reminded through all of this, as I am, that hospitality is not meant to be routinely familiar? I think it is good to carry the above attitudes into our present contexts of giving and receiving. For we too serve an alienated world just like Jesus and the apostles did!

Stay tuned for ‘Hospitality in an Alienated World, Part 2’, where I will focus on hospitality in the Old Testament.

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Bibliography:

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