

## Offering Holy Hospitality



<Matthew 10:40-42>

*<sup>40</sup> “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; <sup>42</sup> and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

The scripture comes at the end of a conversation that Jesus has had with the disciples that we call the Missionary Discourse. Jesus has told the disciples that he is sending them out and that they will be welcomed in some places and not in others. Where they are not welcomed, they are to shake the dust of their feet and go to the next village. Jesus finishes with the words that we just heard.

While much of the Missionary Discourse focuses upon the fate of the disciples themselves, this passage addresses the rewards of those who hear the gospel and show hospitality to those whom Jesus sends their way. In just a few short sentences of power and compassion, we are challenged to think more deeply about what is meant by welcoming one another. It is only after doing so that we discover the reward that comes from the deep hospitality found in God’s welcome of us. Our offering of a **compassionate welcome** or **holy hospitality** is a form of service to Christ.



It can be as simple as offering a glass of water, and is not confined to large heroic acts by those eligible for sainthood. The simple, basic acts of kindness we perform in genuine welcome of one another are all that God asks of us. We must look around us to see who is in need and then do something about it.

Although Jesus speaks of rewards in this passage, we should not offer compassionate welcome with the expectation that something will be returned to us, but because it is the right thing to do, and in so-doing we too will be transformed.



I was struck by one commentator that I read who said: *Jesus mentions a “cup of cold water” to indicate not only hospitality but sacrifice: to offer cold water required drawing water from a deep well and often carrying it uphill in a heavy jar to the family home. Who would want to drink room-temperature water if new, cold well water was available? The simple act of giving “a cup of cold water” to an ordinary believer was a sacrificial act, a generous gift that might require another arduous trip downhill to the village well to draw up more cold water for the household.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Bonnie L. Pattison, “Matthew 10:40-42, Theological Perspective” in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds., *Feasting on the Gospels*, Matthew, Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).



Hospitality is a mark of Christian discipleship, a quality of Christian community, a concrete expression of commitment to grow in Christ-likeness by seeing ourselves “not to be served but to serve.” By practicing compassionate hospitality we become part of God’s invitation to new life, showing people that God in Christ values them and loves them.

**How could we deepen our practice of holy hospitality?** Let me share a story with you that I heard them told by one of my favorite UM ministers, Rev. Adam Hamilton.<sup>2</sup> *Those of you at Chantry have heard me tell this story before but I like it and think it is worth repeating and remembering.*



First, let me set some background up for you. In the USA, most High Schools have a football team. I am talking about American football, which is kind of a cross between rugby and soccer. From September through November, there are High School football leagues, so for about 10 weeks, every Friday there is a football game, with half of them being home games. When it is a home game, a good proportion of the students turn up to watch. And many parents come to watch too. And locals also support the team. And then, well as the footballers and the fans, there are cheerleaders. And some schools also have dance teams and a marching band. The cheerleaders lead cheers after each play. And the band plays short bits at key points in the game. And at half time, there’s a show. Friday HS football is huge and it brings the community together. *Our three boys did not play football, but they were in the band, and we went to watch every home game for 8 years! Even after they graduated, we still went for some games.* The away team bring their football team, the cheerleaders, and a few fans. There are some bleachers for them to sit in, but there is nowhere near as much seating or support for the away team. There is definitely a home-team advantage.

I am going to tell you a story about Grapevine Faith HS, which is a Christian school in the Texas area. Grapevine Faith were set to win their division. They had won 6 games and lost 2 games. It was the last game of the season. It was a home game. They were going to play the Gainesville State team. Gainesville had lost every game of the season. They had only scored two touchdowns all season. So it was going to be an easy triumphant, celebratory game for Grapevine Faith. Plus ... the Gainesville team would have no parents, no family members, no friends and no cheerleaders to support them because Gainesville was a Maximum Security Correctional Facility and the boys would arrive on a bus with security guards.

**What would you do?** As a Christian School, how do you offer hospitality for a Friday night football game with your side pumped up to win the division with packed stands and cheerleaders and the whole community excited for the win, when the bleachers at the other side would be empty and the opposing football team expecting to lose the game. **What would you do? How would you behave towards the other team? What does a compassionate welcome or holy hospitality look like?**



Well, Coach Hogan sent a letter out to all the parents at Grapevine Faith HS. He asked half of them to sit on the Gainesville side of the stadium and cheer for the Gainesville team, cheering against their own children. He also took half the cheerleaders and got them to cheer for Gainesville. On the day 300 volunteers formed a Spirit-line and as the Gainesville team ran on the field they broke through a banner that said Gainesville Tornados. while the stadium erupted into applause.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Hamilton, *When Christians Get it Wrong: When Christians Get it Right* (sermon 02-08-09), [www.cor.org](http://www.cor.org).



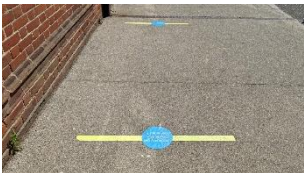
The Gainesville kids were dumbfounded at first and thought there was some mistake. As they played the game, **Grapevine** Faith had a couple of early touchdowns, so Coach Hogan put in his third-string Grapevine Faith players. For the first time all season Gainesville scored 2 touchdowns in one game. The **Grapevine** Faith parents rooted for and cheered on the Gainesville boys. Although the Gainesville team lost the game and ended the season 0-9, they were so excited they gave their coach a bath of water from gatorade bottles.

After the game, both teams gathered in the middle of the field to pray and a boy called Isaiah surprised everybody by asking to lead. Isaiah said this: *"Lord, I don't know how this happened, so I don't know how to say thank You, but I never would've known there was so many people in the world that cared about us."*

The Gainesville boys were escorted back to their bus by their guards and given a sack (picnic) dinner by **Grapevine** Faith to take with them. As the bus pulled away the boys crammed onto one side of the bus to wave at the parents who were waving them goodbye. Tears were flowing down many faces.

When Coach Hogan was asked why he did this, he said, "imagine if you didn't have a home life everyone had given up on you, imagine what it would mean suddenly for everyone to believe in you? As they left the Gainesville coach grabbed Coach Hogan and said to him "You will never ever know how much this meant to these boys."

Grapevine Faith Christian High School offered **holy** hospitality. It did not cost them anything. They were going to the game anyway. They did not give up their win. Yet by thinking about things differently, their actions made all the difference. **Holy hospitality is rooted in compassion and mercy. It takes the resources that we already have and uses them in creative ways.** *Holy* hospitality transforms lives. As we offer *Holy* hospitality welcoming the stranger in the name of Christ we will find ourselves welcoming Christ and we too will be blessed by the encounter.



We are in the middle of a pandemic. There are things that we cannot do at the moment. We have to stand 2 meters apart. We cannot offer hugs. We cannot offer refreshments. **The ways we think about / and offer hospitality will have to change. But with some creative thought, there are still options open to us.**



When we finally get back to church, we will be sitting with a distance between us, we will not be able to sing or distribute hymn books or have a coffee time or shake hands. It will feel very different. There will be a one-way system entering one way and leaving another. Yet, we will welcome each other, with a smile. **And we will think creatively about what we do to welcome one another. Let me know what ideas you have.**

This week, with a risk-assessment in place, Museum Street piloted a Garden Get-Together. Kath, one of the leaders of the church, invited 5 women to her garden. She tied her gate back so no one had to touch the handle. The guests each brought their own chairs and their own refreshments. They sat 6 feet apart and had a wonderful time together. Kath said that it was very strange to be the host but not able to offer a drink. Holy hospitality now means offering hospitality in creative ways using what we have to keep everyone safe. *After the 4<sup>th</sup> July, we will be gradually setting up more garden gettogethers for those who feel they want to come together to chat and their health allows it.*

Other churches in the circuit are offering hospitality in various ways. Our circuit website has a selection of stories. There was a new story this week from a member of one of the Felixstowe Methodist Churches. She has been painting stones and turning them into ladybirds. Each comes with a sticker saying: "Please take me. Keep well. Keep safe. I'm the only bug you need." The hope is they will raise a smile and cheer people up. The circuit has been getting creative online too offering a welcome in new ways. Coffee mornings have been happening by Zoom. Phone calls have abounded. Videos have been made for you to watch. Elizabeth, our lay worker, has been doing storytime, singtime, and crafttime online for the toddler group and for the two library groups that she is involved with. The good news is that you have received hospitality from others in many ways during this time. I am sure that you too have been offering hospitality to others in some new and different ways.



As Jesus says, "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*"

Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

### Resources

Bartlett, David L. and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. *Feasting on the Word*. Year A, Volume 3. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds. *Feasting on the Gospels*. Matthew, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.