**The Hospitality of Faith**

Based on [Mark 6:1-13](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mk6.1-13)

Preached on July 5, 2015

Pentecost 6, Proper 10

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Our Gospel lesson for today has to do with hospitality, how God presumes upon the hospitality of people in order to deliver his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus.

Hospitality is a word that means receiving guests. In the bible, Hospitality comes from a Greek word "*philoxenia"* that means literally "love of strangers". Perhaps today we don't think much about loving strangers. **We tell our children to steer clear of them, we pass them by on the street or the marketplace without so much of an "hello" or a smile, today we even have another Greek word describing a type of paranoia "*xenophobia"* the fear of strangers.** Hospitality is the opposite of that, it's where we get the word "Hospital" and "Hospice" from--the care of strangers.

Hospitality, *philoxenia* was important in the ancient world for many reasons, not the least of which was on account of travel. Today you can get in the car and travel to Calgary and if you run out of gas, get out your cell phone and call CAA. **Or if you're unexpectedly tired and hungry, you can stop in the next town a few minutes ahead and, if there's no big sporting events happening in town, you'll likely find a room for a stranger such as yourself at a Hotel (another word based on hospitality).** And to get a Hotel room today you don't have to be particularly friendly or kind yourself, you just need a major credit card and you've got lodgings.

In bible times, travel was hard in ways that go beyond having no lumbar support or sciatica from sitting in one place too long. Traveling was mostly by foot and it, made you very vulnerable to bandits, to the elements, to circumstances beyond your control. This vulnerability explained the very real need and appreciation of hospitality as a virtue. So much so, that to refuse a guest, even in the middle of the night, was a shameful thing.

In our Gospel lesson we have two accounts of hospitality, of welcoming strangers. First is our Lord Jesus himself, and how he is received in his hometown. And second is about the Lord's disciples, the twelve apostles he sent out two by two to homes, and how they are to travel, and how they are to be received.

After Jesus finished healing Jairus’s daughter, the gospel from last week, Jesus went to his hometown and his disciples followed him. And when he got there he went into the synagogue, the church, and began preaching. **We don’t know the substance of what he preached, but likely the message of John the Baptist, a message of repentance and preparation for the messiah to come, the very messiah whom he is**. And he was preaching the word of God, which is truly an amazing word and message and so the people were astonished. But the people began to talk themselves down. They began asking the hard-hitting investigative questions, “**Who, what, where, when, why,…how?...How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?**” And they took offense at him. Literally, they were scandalized, stumbled, caused to fall over the familiarity of this Jesus, this man about whom they can say, “I knew you when…”

Familiarity breeds contempt; those words are not in the bible, but that teaching definitely is. Proverbs 25:17 says, “**Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor’s house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you**.” That teaches familiarity can breed contempt; so does our gospel today. It looks like at first, Jesus teaching was being received until they recognized that they knew him. I expect he was a lot like Joseph of the Old Testament when he was a child, a dreamer and a do-gooder and his brothers and sisters resented him for it. At any rate, Jesus says this, “**A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household**.” Evidently, Jesus’ own family, his household was offended when he would preach God’s word to them.

If hospitality is the love of strangers; the opposite would be hatred of friends and family. **Jesus was received in his hometown only until he began to preach, then they began to realize that he was not a stranger after all, then he was not treated hospitably, then the seed of his word could not find purchase in the soil there**. It says, “And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.”

I’ve mentioned before how I know people who close their eyes when listening to sermons. It’s a good practice, because our eyes can be stumbling blocks to our faith. **It’s not because our eyes deceive us or anything, it’s simply because we don’t see God with them, because he doesn’t reveal himself to them, and won’t until Christ comes again.** What we see with our eyes is no doubt real, but it’s not the whole picture. Faith comes only through hearing and hearing through the Word of God. Faith is hospitable, it welcomes anonymous strangers, it loves to receive guests.

Therefore, we are saved by faith, that is by welcoming and receiving our God who--by the way--is totally foreign to us; his ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). He is a strange God, but when by faith we welcome him into our home, he brings his message of repentance and forgiveness to our ears, and gives us His Holy Spirit to prepare us for the day he comes again. **For on the Last day Jesus himself will say to his sheep, “Come 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 welcomed me.** Jesus says, his sheep are the ones who have shown hospitality, because he is a stranger coming with a strange message; hardened hearts slam doors, but hearts of faith receive guests and welcome them.

So next, our Gospel says how Jesus sends his disciples out as strangers to preach repentance and presume upon the hospitality, the love of strangers in order to preach to them repentance and faith in the reign of the kingdom of God that is near; the king who has authority over demons, spirits and all unclean things. Jesus calls the twelve and sends them out, and here’s the point…send them out without provisions. Only one tunic; sandals not sturdy shoes, no money, no food, no bag to store things in for when you need them.

Jesus sends them out without any means of providing or sustaining themselves. This is for two reasons, first to trust that their heavenly Father will provide them what they need. Now I wouldn’t recommend you go on a long trip without bringing money or provisions, but then again, you don’t have God telling you to do that. If you did that you’d be testing God, not trusting him**. But the disciples have the command of Jesus and so they need not worry that, come what may, their heavenly Father will accomplish the purpose for which they were sent.**

So too friends, this should encourage us of the comfort and certainty of having a word from God to rely on. When God commands something, you don’t have to decide whether or not it’s a smart idea. God says, don’t commit adultery you don’t have to think, “**Yeah, but I might miss out on the true love that I don’t seem to have in my marriage**.” You can obey God’s command, and not have to worry about making a mistake, for that’s what it means to trust God, do what he commands knowing that he will provide for your needs better than you can with your worries and doubts and anxieties and fears.

The other reason Jesus commands them not to take provisions with them is because they are to presume upon the hospitality of those who would receive them into their homes. **They are going out as strangers in need of hospitality so that, when they come to a sheep of God’s own fold, the sheep will have the opportunity to be hospitable to Jesus, by welcoming his messengers.** And the messengers are not just supposed to dine and dash, they are to stay in that house and teach, becoming familiar, becoming family, teaching them of the need to repent and believe the gospel.

This is opposite our notion of mission work as it’s understood today. Today we think of mission work as humanitarian aid to help people in need. When Jesus sent out his first disciples, ***they*** were to be the ones in need. ***They*** were to be vulnerable to the elements and subject to the kindness or cruelty of others while they preached the truth and gave the world an opportunity to be hospitable to Jesus **in the preaching of his message, of law and gospel, of repentance and forgiveness, of command and of promise, of the message that you have failed God, but God has not failed you, for when we are faithless he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).**

And of course, there are those who will not be hospitable, who will not receive the disciples, who perhaps after a while, familiarity will breed contempt and they will be able to do no mighty work there, just like Jesus in his hometown. In that case, it is no use to, as Jesus says, cast pearls to swine. **Not that any people that God has made are as swine to Him, but you don’t keep giving the gift to someone if they continually deny the giver.** You don’t keep preaching the gospel if it’s persistently trampled underfoot. So Jesus has his disciples shake the dust off their feet, as a testimony against them. That they have been given the Word but have rejected it, and move on.

These are harsh words, and difficult to accept. That Jesus’ message will not always be received, but rejected. But that, is in God’s hands. What is in our hands is the Gospel, and we make ourselves vulnerable to share it, trusting that the lord does not send his Word into the world for nothing, but it will accomplish the purpose for which he sent it.

**By faith you have received Jesus, you are hospitable to this strange man whose Word is preached to sinners and through sinners.**  Christ sends his church out as vulnerable strangers in a broken world that needs his mercy and grace. And yet we persevere because when we are vulnerable, God is capable. When we are weak, God is strong. When we have nothing to boast of it is our loving father who reminds us, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness**” (2 Cor 12:9). Our weakness in preaching the gospel, gives the world the opportunity to welcome Jesus who is a stranger, that he may invite them to the baptismal font, as he first welcomed you into his household of faith.