

January 17, 2010
John 2:1-11
Creekside COB

You Are Cordially Invited

A certain county agent had to go to a farm in his jurisdiction to talk with the farmer about a matter of county business. Walking up the dirt road leading to the farm, he encountered signs that read things like: "Trespassers will be shot," "Beware of Dog," "Keep Out . . . This Means You!" Finally arriving at the door, he was greeted by a smiling, congenial farmer. When the county agent was ready to leave, the farmer said to him, "Come and see me again sometime. I don't get many visitors up this way."

Some people do not have the gift of hospitality, do they!

How does hospitality look to you? What are some of the characteristics that you find in someone who has a gift of hospitality? You might find generosity, kindness, self-sacrificing caring and nurturing.

I have friends who have a wonderful gift of hospitality. When we visit, they have everything ready for us and our room is equipped with personal items that they know that we use. They cook the things that we enjoy and open their house to us. We have access to anything they have and they want us to take advantage of it. They make us feel comfortable and at home and we can be the real us without worrying about what they might think. You know what I mean, you can get up in the morning and not have to worry that you look like you just get up. They are like family.

Unlike my hospitality, when they came to visit us, I wanted to do something special for them so I made them a homemade coffee cake on Sunday morning. Now you know for me Sunday mornings are sacred. I rise early and I like to put myself in a quiet mode for church. I like to go over my sermon and just have time alone. So, for me to make a coffee cake is not something that is easy. However, I love

these people and wanted them to feel special.

So around 5:30 Sunday morning, I made a coffee cake and all of a sudden smoke began to pour out of the oven because my oven needed cleaning and it set off the smoke alarm. Now the smoke alarm wasn't just anywhere. The stairs to the upstairs went up from the kitchen and right at the top of the stairs was the smoke alarm a few feet from their bedroom. Well, I ran up the stairs to try to shut it off and couldn't reach it. I ran down the stairs to wake up Byrl as he was tall enough to shut it off. Well, by that time every one was up. What a fiasco! No, they did not have that kind of hospitality.

Businesses go to great lengths to practice hospitality too. The hotels are equipped with WiFi, launderers, and errand staff to take care of anything that we may need. I remember going on a cruise years ago and the one thing I was astonished by was that it seemed like they knew my need before I knew what my needs were. Well, even the Lutheran Hospital Food Service would say, 'Room Service when they brought in a tray that the guests chose from an individual menu.

Hospitality has been around for a long time. Throughout the Bible, hospitality is shown. The prophet Elijah and the widow who gave him food, Abraham shows hospitality to strangers, homes churches evolving offering hospitality.

Years ago when Johnny Carson was the host of The Tonight Show he interviewed an eight year old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coal mine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did Johnny inquired, "What are you learning in Sunday school?" "Last week," came his reply, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, "And what did you learn from that story?" The boy squirmed in his chair. It was apparent he hadn't thought about this. But then he lifted up his face and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!"

It is no accident that Jesus performs His first miracle in John here. A wedding is probably one of the grandest forms of hospitality. A family can lavish us with the best foods and the best music and wine that money can afford. It is no secret that the wedding industry is a million dollar business. There is even a reality wedding show. Weddings can be as elaborate as we want. Celebrities spend the most money on their weddings with Liza Minnelli and David Gest topping the wedding costs with a wedding totaling 3.5 million dollars. But no matter the money spent, the hospitality at weddings make for a grand celebration of two lives joining together.

So it is normal for Jesus and His mother to be here. Hospitality was the epitome of Jewish culture. The community shared their lives like family. Biblical weddings could last an entire week. They would start on a Tuesday and the wedding feast would be presented throughout the week like an open house. Once the ceremony was finished the father of the bride would visit every home in the community so that each person could congratulate her personally. The hospitality was a Jewish community experience and everyone was invited.

So Jesus is there on the third day and all of sudden the wine is gone and his mother tells him that the wine is gone and he responds, "What concern is that to you and to me, after all my hour has not yet come yet." Pretty understandable as the scripture does not indicate Jesus' relation to the bride and groom. However, his mother knows that He can do something about it. A mother knows these things. She knows that Jesus is the Son of God as she was told when she was impregnated by the Spirit of God and that she pondered all these things in her heart so she believes He can do something about it. So Jesus, makes it happen. He knows how important the wine is to the wedding feast.

The wine is a source of joy and celebration in the Jewish community. For the Jews, wine represented life and abundance. Wine was part of their culture. It was an integral part of any celebration especially a wedding. For the wedding to be out of wine was quite the faux pau.

So Jesus asks the others to fill the six water pots with water and then

dip some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they fill the pots to the brim and the master of the feast was astonished that the wine tasted fabulous.

This was the first miracle sign in the book of John. There isn't a more appropriate place for Jesus to begin to reveal His glory. He begins to reveal the glory of God in a place of lavish hospitality.

I am reminded of a movie that I saw when I was in seminary. I wasn't able to find the right clip for it so I will give you a synopsis of the movie. In the movie titled, *Babette's Feast*, Babette is a refugee from a counter-revolutionary bloodshed in Paris. She arrives at the home of two sisters in Denmark with a recommendation as a housekeeper from a former suitor of one of the sisters. The sisters take Babette in, and she spends fourteen years as their cook. Babette is a woman of generosity. Her only link to her former life in France is a lottery ticket that a friend in Paris renews for her every year. One day, she wins the lottery of 10,000 francs which would surely allow her to return to her former home in adequate style. However, she instead decides to use the money to prepare a delicious dinner for the sisters and their small church congregation on the occasion of the founding pastor's hundredth birthday. More than just an epicurean delight, the feast is an outpouring of Babette's appreciation, an act of self-sacrifice with eucharistic echoes; though she doesn't tell anyone, Babette is spending her entire winnings on her gesture of love.

Now the congregation is a congregation of Puritans and although the sisters approve of the meal the remainder of the celebrants do their best to reject the earthly pleasures of the food and drink. However, Babette's extraordinary gifts as a Chef de Cuisine and a true connoisseur, so characteristically French, breaks down their distrust and superstitions, elevating them not only physically but spiritually. Old wrongs are forgotten, ancient loves are rekindled, and a mystical redemption of the human spirit settles over the table—thanks to the general elation nurtured by the consumption of so many fine culinary delicacies and spirits. The eucharistic, albeit mundane celebration around the table shadows the "infinite grace.[that] had been allotted to them, and they did not even wonder at the fact, for it had been but the fulfillment of an ever-present hope." [1]

Babette's generous hospitality and fine cuisine and best wine opens the spirit of the congregation to experience the grace of God.

Our hospitality here on earth is just a shadow of the hospitality of the Kingdom of God. It is just a portion of the hospitality that Jesus shares with us.

As Babette offers the greatest hospitality to this Puritan congregation, Jesus' offers the highest form of hospitality to all.

Jesus invites the world to come and dine with Him. He offers the world an open door to come and be with Him and fellowship with Him.

He says come and sit at my table - a table where life is abundant and grace is poured out overflowing.

Jesus invites us in to have a relationship with Him. He wants more than anything to have a relationship with each and every one of us.

His time has come and the resurrection of the third day when He rose from the tomb to offer all of us an opportunity to be with Him through His Holy Spirit. It is in Him that we enjoy the hospitality of the Kingdom of God because now the Kingdom of God is at hand and His time is here.

He invites us in to sit and dwell with Him. We tell Him our troubles and our joys and He pours out His generous grace that isn't just filled to the brim but pours with a never-ending delight.

Jesus's hospitality embraces us in His generous grace and fills our needs before we even know what they are. He lavishes us in His Spirit. With the invitation, Christ gives us all the blessings that He has and we can access them at anytime.

We can be ourselves. Jesus in His hospitality accepts us just how we are. We can be who we are and because He loves us so much, He doesn't leave us in that way. After spending time in His hospitality, we come away full and rich in His Spirit able to tackle the trials of the day.

Henri Nouwen says that genuine hospitality means "paying attention to the guest." Jesus invites us in and we are important, as if we are the only people on earth. He makes us feel welcome and warm. He hears us and answers us. We say Jesus, I have had a bad day. I need you to fortify me. His grace fortifies us. We say Jesus, my marriage is on the rocks, I need your understanding. His grace comforts us. Jesus invites us to enter in.

Jesus is at this wedding and gives the community a foretaste of glory divine. His miracle says, "Follow me, I want to show you how to celebrate life." I want to show you what my hospitality is. My grace is all sufficient, it isn't filled just to the brim but it overflows.

Jesus invites us in, not just once or twice but everyday. He says, "Come and feast on me. Celebrate life with me come and experience the overflowing grace and joy that the hospitality of the Kingdom of God pours out. You're are invited. Come.

¹"Babette's Feast", in Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard, c. 1993, Vintage International Paperbacks.