

**Sunday 1st September 2019 Hospitality**  
**Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 Luke 14:1, 7-14**

**Intro:**

Over the last few weeks, as I have prepared the sermon, there has been one key word that has inspired me each week. This has not been intentional... just how God has led me through the scripture readings

We started off a few weeks ago with HAVEL (vanity / vapour) then FAITH then COMPASSION and this week it's HOSPITALITY Next week will be CHOICE - just to give you a heads up!!

I have enjoyed reading about and considering just what hospitality means as a Christian and could have spent a lot longer reading about it. We have time to think about it only briefly this morning but it is a topic we shall come back to.

So... when I say the word hospitality I wonder what you think of?

I think I have mentioned to you before about a friend of mine who used to work for a French oil company. She tells great stories of exciting days or evenings out, hosted by the company who offered hospitality to her and some of her colleagues. She was invited to days driving all sorts of smart cars, she was wined and dined, she enjoyed many different events and activities put on by different parties in some way linked to the oil company she worked for. And all of this was offered under the name of hospitality.

Or maybe you had been to events where there have been hospitality tents. Venues set aside for invited guests where they are plied with a range of drinks and foods. Often no expense spared. Maybe you have been fortunate to be one of those invited guests.

Someone I was talking to a few weeks ago had got a new job at one of the big car dealerships in Camberley and part of her new role was to offer hospitality to potential customers when they came to the showroom with the intent of buying a new car.

'Hospitality' of various kinds but which, I suggest, are quite different from the hospitality talked about in the Bible and especially by Jesus. Whilst my friend, and many others, have received a welcome through various forms of public or corporate hospitality, there has been a subtle, and maybe even not so subtle, ulterior motive behind offering the hospitality. The companies want to keep their potential clients, or employees, or customers in their good books, buttered up, put into a good mood, often in the hope of some benefit for themselves. This is where Christian hospitality is so different.

**Let's look at our 2 readings...**

Both the reading from Hebrews and from Luke's gospel talk about offering hospitality, not to our best friends but in fact to strangers and not just rich and friendly strangers. Both readings teach us to offer hospitality to those who we may not normally spend time with: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and even those in prison, invite those who may never normally get an invitation, those who may be unable to reciprocate.

Sometimes I think we can mistake 'entertaining' for hospitality. There is a subtle but important difference. And it is to do with 'us' and 'them'! Entertaining can become all about us. But hospitality is all about them.

If 'hospitality' becomes all about making me look good, my success at folding the most amazing napkin creations, my phenomenal ability at baking in preparation for becoming the next potential Bake Off entrant..... [and less about making those we welcome feel comfortable and welcomed and truly noticed then, maybe, it is not hospitality and more entertaining.](#)

I read this in a blog...The lady is talking about the hospitality that she had witnessed her parents sharing with people and then says *'One particular evening as I was preparing for a dinner party, my vacuum broke! What to do? What to do? How in the world can you have a successful evening without vacuuming?! So, I did what any normal, sane housewife would do: I vacuumed with it broken! Why? Because it made perfect vacuum lines, and gave the appearance of a perfectly clean floor!!!'*

I love this...

But I wonder... Can you remember a time when you experienced real hospitality?? Over 20 years ago now, a friend and I were travelling. We were in New Zealand and due to move on in a few weeks to Perth in Australia. We went horse riding for the afternoon and got talking to a lady who lived in Perth. We had a good chat, must have told her our outline plans and said goodbye at the end of a great afternoon.

Several weeks later we flew into Perth and as we came through, out of customs, we saw this same lady standing there holding up a sign with our names on. She came over to us, welcomed us and invited us to go and stay with her. We had not told her our flight details. She had looked them up. She took us back to her home, gave us lovely rooms to stay in for the days we were there and did all she could to make us feel welcome and relaxed and at home. She put herself out for us and we have never been able to reciprocate her generosity. I have no idea if she was a Christian or not but her hospitality in giving us, almost strangers, time and understanding was genuine and something I shall never forget.

The notion of hospitality as entertainment invades much of contemporary society. We can so often fall into thinking that giving hospitality means chasing away frowns and churning out glee by the gallon.

But what if it is more about just making SPACE for other people, space to see and hear them, to REALLY see and hear THEM?

What if it is more about putting our own needs and desires on hold for a while and being attentive to the other person? Without prejudice or the intentions of pushing our viewpoint forward.

What if it is about talking less and listening more?

What if it is about serving them but with gentleness and humility so that we receive from one another and are blessed by one another?

What if, when those to whom we extend hospitality leave feeling loved and cherished and appreciated? What if they leave our company feeling so much better than when they arrived?

What if this is the kind of hospitality that the writer to the Hebrews, and Jesus are talking about?

I believe that hospitality is a mark of holiness. It takes us off the pedestal, the need to have everything perfect, even the vacuum lines ready in the thick pile carpet!! :-)) and replaces our self importance with the the needs and blessing of the other person. The focus is not us but them

Being inspired by this theme of hospitality I bought a book called 'A Christian Theology of Hospitality' by Arthur Sutherland. I haven't managed to read all of it but I did read this

'The decline of hospitality is a veritable crisis. Hospitality is not simply the practice of a virtue but is integral to the very nature of Christianity's position towards God, self and the world. It is at the very centre of what it means to be a Christian.'

Hospitality is at the very centre of what it means to be a Christian; a virtue, integral to our understanding of who God is, something where both the host and the guest give and receive. Maybe the Cross is the most incredible example of hospitality! Jesus' treatment of others at the cross is all about the other person and nothing to do with Jesus' needs. But 'the others' need to receive that loving grace from Jesus. And in doing so both Jesus and the others, including us, both give and receive something of themselves.

So where or how can we make room for others, how can we truly welcome and offer hospitality to others, as individuals, as a church, as a nation?

We will come back to this theme over the next few months in different ways but one way, that we may not even think of as hospitality, is welcoming and sharing with and receiving from as well as offering something to, our local Nepalese community.

Verity is going to come and share an opportunity with us.....

It seems to me that, in our busy lives and busy world, we see more & more people but we encounter, in a deeper sense, fewer and fewer.

I want to encourage us to think about what it really means to be hospitable.

To make time to be generously attentive to another person.

To truly listen to them and hear their story.

It may involve a lovely meal with a glass or 2 of wine but with 'the other person' as the emphasis and not ourselves

It may involve a conversation with someone where we give time and space and a safe place for the other person to just be themselves without us driving the conversation or agenda.

It will probably mean forgoing something of ourselves for the sake of the other person

But it will in turn mean sharing something of Jesus' love to others.

It will mean that we are living more like Jesus

It will mean that we encounter people in all their rich beauty and not just see them at a glance.

And it will mean that, in the process, we may even encounter angels.