



GENEROUS HOSPITALITY AT WORK

Welcome to a six-week study series on “Generous Hospitality at Work”. Here are some introductory comments to help you plan your studies:

Pre-Week 1 (Leader’s Guide)

LUKE

It’s appropriate that these studies on hospitality are based in *Luke*. Not only does Luke have more mealtime scenes than any of the other gospel writers, he also majors in incidents, sayings, and parables that focus our attention on how we care for those who aren’t normally part of our social circles. You might like to say that *Luke* is the gospel of Generous Hospitality.

EATING TOGETHER

It’s great to study and reflect on what hospitality is. But it’s even better if this is accompanied by practicing it. So, we want to suggest that you meet together around a shared meal. If you’re planning on doing this series together at your workplace, then it might be as simple as soup and bread around the lunch table – or going out to a restaurant or café.

Plus, we’d like to challenge you as a group to plan another meal or two over the next few weeks where you invite some of your workmates who aren’t involved in the group study but whom you’d like to express hospitality to. These meals could be as planned as a celebration, or as casual as inviting a couple of colleagues out for breakfast or lunch at a local café.

To help us in our practice of hospitality there is also a “Challenge for the Week” at the end of each study. Along with the meals, these challenges will help us step out of our comfort zones and risk a little. Just what we all need!

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Included in the studies are six thought-provoking movies that connect with the themes of the studies. There are several ways these can be used:

1. As an alternative to the studies – watching the suggested movie together and discussing it. There are some questions provided to assist this.
2. As an evening in the week – the movies are a great way to share an evening with others you normally wouldn't get together with. Doing so over a meal or supper, as suggested above, is even better.
3. As an option for individuals to watch in their own time during the week. If you pursue this option, you may like to create a brief space at the beginning or end of the main study to share reflections.

PLANNING YOUR TIMES

With lots of options for meeting together, it will be important to plan well.

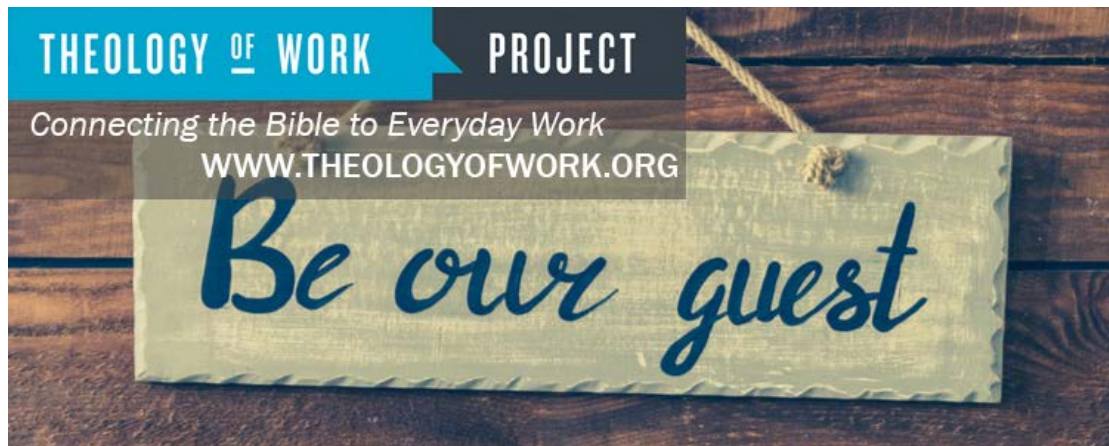
Studies: each study has more questions than you will probably be able to engage with in the time available, so our suggestion is that the facilitator of each study pre-select the ones they think will most engage your group.

Movies: you will need to plan ahead to ensure you have access to each movie.

Meals: it goes without saying that preparation and planning is key to good shared meals. This is particularly so if you are seeking to invite guests who are strangers. Thinking through what will help them feel welcome is as important as the meal itself.

Anyway, these are just suggestions. Ultimately it's yours to make the six weeks a time of challenge, and an opportunity to practice the life of hospitality.

Bon appetit!



WEEK 1: THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

The short story and movie *Babette's Feast* is the story of a small, remote Norwegian fishing village in the 19th century, where a tiny and ageing Christian sect seeks to live out their faith. It's a very austere existence and life is hard.

One night a young French woman arrives seeking refuge. She has fled from danger in Paris at a time of civil war, and a friend of hers has given her the name of two sisters who live in the village. Though they possess little, the sisters take Babette in. She offers to work for them in exchange for board, and it is agreed that she will cook and help them. While the meals they eat are very basic and bland, Babette gladly prepares the food and serves her hosts, without complaint.

Many years later, Babette is still working for the two sisters when she receives word from a friend in Paris that she has won a large sum of money in a lottery. The friend has faithfully bought a lottery ticket each year on Babette's behalf.

About the same time the two sisters decide to organize a special meal to celebrate the hundredth birthday of their long deceased father – who was the founding pastor of the sect. Babette offers to cook and to pay for the celebration.

Though the sisters don't know it, in her former life Babette was one of the top Parisian chefs. She uses her former contacts to send for the very best ingredients; they are shipped all the way from France – quails and turtle, the very best wine. As the ingredients arrive in the village, the sisters begin to worry that the feast will be an act of sensual and sinful indulgence, completely out of keeping with their ascetic values. However, recognizing that Babette has gone to a lot of effort, the villagers agree amongst themselves to eat the meal, on the condition they don't enjoy or comment on it!

The feast is sumptuous and lavish, way beyond what any of the villagers have ever experienced. The only guest not part of the sect is the nephew of one of the women, who once wished to marry one of the sisters. Now a famous general, Lorens is well accustomed to fine dining. As the courses keep appearing, he provides a running commentary on the stunning food and drink – at one point noting that it reminds him of an extraordinary meal he had years earlier in a café in Paris.

As the meal progresses a remarkable transformation occurs around the table. Babette's meal slowly breaks down the long-held mistrust between the villagers. Old wrongs are forgotten and a mystical healing amongst the community takes place.

After the meal is finished and the guests have left, the sisters inquire as to what Babette's plans are, given her lottery winnings. They presume that she will return to Paris but are shocked when Babette explains that she has spent all her money on the feast and will not be leaving. (The sisters also discover that Babette was the head chef of the Parisian café the general had alluded to.)

Babette, who came as the guest many years ago, has now become the host. And the money that might have taken her back to Paris to re-establish herself, has been sacrificed in one generous act of gratitude and hospitality.

- What impacts you most from the story of Babette's Feast?
- Have you ever been treated to a fine meal that you didn't really appreciate?
- Share your favorite food. Why do you like it so much?

Hospitality

The theme for these studies is "Generous Hospitality". What do we mean by this phrase?

Discuss

- What does the word "hospitality" bring to mind for you?
- What does the word "generous" bring to mind for you?
- Why do we usually associate food or eating with the word "hospitality"?
- Who do you find it easiest to be hospitable to? Why?
- Share a memorable meal you have had (either with a handful of folk or in a larger group). What made it so good?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- Babette is a hospitality worker. What does the movie indicate to us about the nature of Babette's approach to her work? What can we learn from Babette in regard to our own attitude to work in the hospitality industry?

The root of our English word hospitality is from Latin. Other words we have from the same root are host, hospital, hospice, and hotel. All of them allude to care or welcoming of guests or strangers.

Of course, these days we are much more likely to associate hospitality either with the whole industry of restaurants and hotels (professional/paid services), or with dinner parties (like Babette's Feast) and other occasions involving food and drink. And while coffee and cookies after church on Sunday can be a form of hospitality, as we'll discover over the next few weeks, hospitality in the Bible involves so much more.

Practicing generous hospitality really has three layers to it. The first point of hospitality is the one we're generally most comfortable and familiar with – *our family and close friends or workmates*. The second layer is hospitality to *guests and newcomers*. And the third (and most challenging) is to people who are right outside our own “world” – folk who are strangers to us, not just because we don't know them, but also because their experience of life is so very different to ours. Often they are the least, the last, and the lost.

Luke 9: 10-17 Feeding of the Masses

Read through this passage twice, pausing at the end of each read for silent reflection.

**“Hospitality is not so much a task as it is a way of living our lives and sharing ourselves.”
Christine Pohl**

Setting the scene

This miracle clearly left an indelible mark in the memory of the early church. All four gospel writers have included it in their stories. It is likely that the multiplication of food would have brought to mind the provision of manna in the desert – a connection particularly developed by John in his telling of the story (John 6). The incident is often referred to as the “feeding of the 5000” – but if we read Luke's account closely, we see that is just the number of *men* present (unfortunately it's a very ancient way of counting!), suggesting that by the time women and children were taken into account, it would have been many more than 5000.

Discuss

- What is one thing that impacts you most from this story?
- Why do you think Jesus put it back on the disciples, by saying, (in verse 13) “You feed them”?
- Why do you think the miracle worker over-catered (verse 17) and what might this suggest about God's nature?
- Can you recall a time when God provided for you in a surprising or generous way? Share it with the group. What effect did this experience have on you?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- In verse 17, Luke notes that there were substantial leftovers from the meal, which serves to emphasize God's generosity of provision. However, it also raises an interesting question for those of us involved in the hospitality industry – “what do we do with the often significant levels of waste – in particular, food and drink?” Discuss this issue – specifically how big an issue it is, in your experience, and what can be done about it.

Prayer

Spend some time expressing gratitude to God for all that he has provided and blessed us with. Be specific and don't limit it to just physical needs.

Challenge for the Week!

Here are a couple of small challenges for this week:

1. Take time to observe how people are welcomed at your workplace – particularly customers, visitors, or new staff members.

- What practices and people help to make them feel welcome?
- What aspects of your work environment might be awkward for strangers?
- How do you think your workplace does in “hosting” visitors or new people?

2. Plan to take the initiative this week, by welcoming someone who is new or who you don't really know in whatever way you sense is appropriate.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Babette's Feast (1987) 102 minutes

Summary: In a small, remote fishing village on the northern coast of Norway, live two sisters. Martine and Philippa are part of a small devout Christian sect, founded by their long-departed father. On a wet night in 1871 a French woman knocks on their door, seeking refuge from troubles in her homeland. The kindly sisters reluctantly take her in and in exchange for lodgings, Babette cooks for them. However, it is not until years later that the truth of the Frenchwoman's previous life comes to light. And in a remarkable act of generosity, the Babette hosts a meal that brings reconciliation to the small faith community.



Based on a short story by Isak Dinesen (also the author of *Out of Africa*) the movie draws on themes of hospitality, community, and gratitude.

- What impacts you most from the story of Babette's Feast?
- Have you ever been treated to a fine meal that you didn't really appreciate? Or an act of generosity you struggled to accept because of your values?
- Why do you think the faith of the two sisters (and their fellow church members) caused them to believe anything but the plainest food was sinful and extravagant? How did Babette respond to this?
- Why do you think Babette decided to stay in the village and blow her lottery winnings on an extravagant meal – when she knew this might go unappreciated as well as resulting in her having to stay?
- The small sect was ridden with old grievances and resentments. Why might a meal such as Babette's feast have caused the healing of such relational divisions? Do you think this was part of Babette's hope for the feast, or was it merely a way for her to express her gratitude for their hospitality?
- What does the movie indicate to us about the nature of Babette's approach to work? What can we learn from Babette in regard to our own attitude to work?
- Read Luke 9: 10-17 (the feeding of the masses). What impacts you most about this story? Why do you think the miracle worker over-catered (verse 17) and what might this suggest about God's nature?



WEEK 2: GIFTS OF HOSPITALITY

One of my good friends is a “foodie” and his youngest son is a chef, who runs a cafe. Together they cook up a storm. Many times I have been the recipient of my friend’s fine meals. Some years ago, on the occasion of his 50th birthday, Phil invited a group of his closest friends and family to a sumptuous banquet, prepared, cooked and served by himself and Luke his son. Imagine that: to celebrate his birthday, Phil likes nothing better than being host, chef, waiter and dishwasher to those he loves the most!

When Phil cooks me something, he is always eager to hear my response. While I appreciate good food, I don’t have the acquired sensitivities that allow me to fully absorb the crafted meal set before me, but I *do* know a great deal of care and skill has gone into its making.

Of course, Phil is not looking to me for expert opining about the intricacies of his creations. Neither is his keenness to know how the food has been received based on a desperate desire for affirmation – or gratitude. Instead, it seems to me that having blessed me (and others) with his culinary creations, he is eager for me to taste and appreciate the same delight and joy he does.

Put simply: he delights in expressing love and care for others through cooking.

Phil pastors a small congregation that unsurprisingly is known for its hospitality and communal meals. In fact, a mutual friend of ours calls them the “gastro church”! It’s an apt description. The emphasis on food is very intentional. They recognize that community is built around the table, gathering together around a meal is eucharistic (giving thanks to God), and a key part of their mission is through hospitality.

Food is made to be shared. Or to put it another way, the building of relationship and community is a key element of eating. It is not meant to be a solo experience. Sadly, in many countries, eating alone is now the norm. For example, in the US, the average number of meals per week people share with others is three – and they last just twenty minutes each. If, as Sidney Mintz, professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University asserts, “Interaction over food is the single most important feature of socializing”, then we are in deep trouble.

It is significant that three of the four most defining eating experiences in the Bible are communal meals – the Passover, the Last Supper (leading to the Eucharist) and the still-to-come Feast of the Lamb. Interestingly, only the eating of the fruit in Genesis 3

is a little less than a shared meal. And a great deal of the recorded life of Jesus seems to be around meals with others.

All cultures intuitively recognize that food and community should go hand-in-hand. “The Meal” is a universal (or supra-cultural) phenomenon. Eating together has a prized place in every ethnic and cultural group. Think Italian, Mexican, Jewish, Maori, Turkish, Moroccan, Thai or Japanese. Not only are there distinctive foods and tastes developed by each of these ethnicities, there are also important rituals around the preparation, presentation and consumption of food.

As Australian chef, pastor and theologian Simon Holt so eloquently puts it:

Eating expresses our common humanity. Food is what brings us together and holds us there. There is barely a relational aspect of life that is not formalized, ritualized, celebrated or facilitated by the acts of eating and drinking. The truth is, food is the great leveler; it is our common need and is made to share.

Which explains why both Jesus and Paul were very tough on people who used the meal table as a means of establishing status and control over others, or of reinforcing already existing economic and social divisions. Simon the Pharisee tried that game on Jesus when he hosted him for a meal, intentionally snubbing Jesus by not following the usual etiquette. Jesus graciously but firmly contrasted Simon’s behavior with that of the woman of bad character who lavished care on him. Paul too, had little time for the status games that some of the more wealthy members of the church in Corinth were playing. For him, they completely betrayed the very meaning of the Eucharist.

In spite of our tendency to allow the meal table to exclude those we don’t like or value, or to undermine relationships, God’s intention is for eating together to be a time of deep community and sharing, when relationships are enriched and strengthened.

Discuss

- Share one thing that impacts you from this reflection.
- What is it about eating together that makes it (as Simon Holt suggests), the “great leveler”?
- Make a quick list of as many meals, stories involving food, or sayings about food as you can recall from the Bible.

Questions specific to those in the hospitality industry

- Given the priority the Bible places on meals and eating together, what impetus might this give for you in your role as a host/cook/waiter/waitress? And in what ways can you see potential to work with God?
- What have you observed (both positively and/or negatively) regarding how hospitality workers have been treated by guests/customers? What attitudes are most common? And what about your own experience?

Luke 10:38-42 Martha and Mary

Read through this passage twice, pausing at the end of each read for silent reflection.

Setting the scene

Here’s a well-known gospel story about hospitality. The traditional interpretation of this story goes something like this: Martha chose the active life, Mary the contemplative; Jesus is affirming Mary’s choice to spend time with Jesus rather than fill her day with work.

However, Bishop Tom Wright argues that, *“The real problem between Martha and Mary wasn’t the workload that Martha had in the kitchen...(it was) that Mary was behaving as if she was a man.”* What does he mean? Well, in Jewish culture the kitchen was the domain of the women, while the living area was the arena for men.

Jesus is affirming Mary’s desire to learn from him (and by implication, to aspire to teach). And by doing so he is challenging the very social mores of his culture.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that both Martha and Mary were seeking to be, in their own way, hospitable to Jesus. Martha was working to prepare a really special meal for Jesus and his disciples. This was a way of honoring him. After all, this is what all hospitable Jewish women were meant to do. And yet her sister, Mary, was not helping where she “should” – leaving Martha all stressed, hot, and bothered!

Instead, Mary was being attentive to their guest in another way. Her hunger to follow and learn from Jesus (while no doubt shocking to the men who were present) was an appropriate way of making room for the Master.

Discuss

- Who do you identify with most? Martha or Mary? Why?
- In *The Message*, verse 41 has Jesus saying, *“Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing.”* Can you recall a time when you have stressed so much about getting the food on the table for guests that you’ve missed the opportunity to spend time with them?
- Table hospitality is about food. But it’s about so much more. What are some things we can do to help ensure that we give time to both the practical and the relational elements of being hospitable?
- Think about an experience where you have been offered hospitality by way of a meal or bed, from someone you didn’t know well. What do you think contributed most to you feeling welcome and relaxed? Or alternatively, what contributed to you feeling in the way and on edge?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- What way/s have you found most effective in helping your guests to feel welcome and at ease? Do you view this as part of your role?

Many gifts of hospitality

Helping people to feel welcome is at the heart of hospitality. But there are many ways of doing this, and they don’t always involve food. Following Jesus is learning to be hospitable – as individuals, and in our workplaces. We don’t all have to be good cooks to do so!

“It is impossible to overstate the significance of paying attention, listening to people’s stories, and taking time to talk with them.” Christine Pohl

Discuss

- Have you ever been the recipient of particularly generous hospitality in your workplace? If so, what made it so special?
- What are some of the reasons why we might feel awkward or apprehensive about taking the initiative with a new colleague or a visitor, and inviting them to have coffee or a meal?
- Share ways in which you seek to make people welcome in your work.
- What helps you to feel welcome when you are in an unfamiliar situation?
- Share any observations you had from the Challenge for the Week.
- How often do your work colleagues eat together (or even have coffee)? What are some of the reasons you think this happens so much – or so little? What difference do you think it would make if this happened more often? How could this change?

Prayer

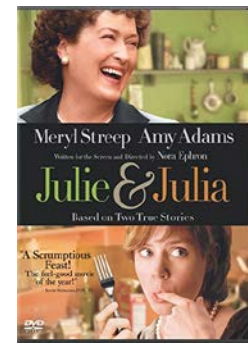
Challenge for the Week!

Okay. Last week was a taster. Now for something a little more challenging! This week, try inviting a workmate out for coffee or lunch. If you can, ask folk you don't know very well. If this seems imposing, do it with someone else in your group. Before you do, think carefully about what might put them at ease.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Julie & Julia (2009) 100 minutes

Summary: This movie contrasts the life of American chef and TV personality Julia Child (played by Meryl Streep) in the early years of her culinary career, with a young writer from New York, Julie Powell (played by Amy Adams), who decides to cook all 524 recipes from Child's cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961), over a single year, and write about it in a blog.



The film explores a number of themes around identity, calling, relationships, hospitality, and the role of food in our lives.

- Share your impressions of the movie. What impacted you most? What intrigued you? What moved you?
- Julie recognizes the comfort and stability that food can bring to our lives. In what ways might this be good and in what ways might it be bad?
- When Julia's husband asks her what she *really* likes to do, Julia flippantly replies, "Eat!" To which Paul replies, "And you're sooo good at it!" This sets in motion Julia's journey into cooking. What do you think it is that makes Julia such a great cook and hostess?
- Simon Holt writes: "*Eating expresses our common humanity... The truth is, food is the great leveler: it is our common need and is made to share.*" In what ways do you think this is true? How does this display itself in this movie?
- Share about the role of food and eating with others, in your life.
- If you're working in the hospitality industry, what lessons/principles does this movie underline?

Read Luke 10:38-42 (the story of Martha and Mary)

- Who do you identify with most? Martha or Mary? Why?
- In *The Message*, verse 41 has Jesus saying, "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing." Can you recall a time when you have stressed so much about getting the food on the table for guests that you've missed the opportunity to spend time with them?
- Table hospitality is about food. But it's about so much more. What are some things we can do to help ensure that we give time to both the practical and the relational elements of being hospitable?



WEEK 3: WELCOMING THE STRANGER

In the southeast of France is an isolated village called Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. Nestled in the mountains, this small farming community was involved in a remarkable act of hospitality during World War II.

When the Nazi's rolled into Paris in 1940, France was home to some 350,000 Jews. Over the next few years over 25% of them perished – either deported to concentration camps or dying in camps within France. Sensing the danger, many fled or looked for help.

While many courageous efforts were made by individuals to help conceal French Jews, the village of Le Chambon was a rare case of a whole community opening its homes, saving over five thousand Jewish children and adults, at great risk to their own safety.

It initially began as a trickle of desperate Jewish families looked for refuge, but as word got out, it eventually became a flood. The community of Le Chambon took them into their homes, hiding them from the authorities, and guiding many across the dangerous countryside to safety in neutral Switzerland.

And yet, the people of Le Chambon were quite unremarkable, in so many ways.

The villagers certainly did not consider themselves particularly virtuous for acting in such a way. Henri and Emma Heritter were typical of many in the understated way they acted, *“We never asked for explanations. When people came, if we could be of help, we did.”* Another villager, Georgette Barraud noted, *“It happened so naturally. We can't understand the fuss. It happened so simply...they'd often arrive at night. We'd manage somehow. We gave up our bed when nothing else was left...I helped simply because they needed to be helped...The Bible says to feed the hungry, to visit the sick. It's a normal thing to do.”*

Their rescue mission was “led” by Andre and Magda Trocme – the pastors of the Huguenot Protestant church in the village. After the Armistice was signed by the French Vichy government with Germany, Andre preached a sermon which inspired the people to action. He proclaimed that, *“The duty of Christians is to resist the violence that has been brought to bear on their conscience, through the weapons of the Spirit...we will do so without fear, but also without pride and without hate.”*

Even so, the terms “led” or “organized” are really too strong to describe what actually happened. One of the intriguing aspects of the interviews conducted by Philip Hallie (recorded in his book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*) and Pierre Sauvage (see his documentary, *Weapons of the Spirit*) with surviving villagers decades after the war, is how naturally the acts of hospitality and refuge occurred. There did not seem to be anything particularly premeditated about the decision to rescue, nor highly organized - at least not initially. Magda Trocme explained, *“Each person, each day, did what seemed necessary. People often ask, ‘What was your organization?’ If we’d had one, we would have failed. You can’t scribble down what is to be done each day. As challenges arose, each person acted on their own. We didn’t know about everything. And people didn’t know what we were doing.”*

In fact, they were doing no more than acting out of their character and values – not just as individuals, but also as a community. It just seemed “the right thing to do”. Many villagers were descendants of the Huguenots – a heavily persecuted Protestant sect who for centuries had been hounded across Europe. They understood what it was like to be persecuted and to be refugees, not wanted wherever they went. This was part of their story – and indeed they held an annual ceremony to commemorate their Huguenot ancestors. The regular retelling of their story, combined with their immersion in the wider gospel narratives, no doubt helped to grow and shape the community’s embodiment of the virtues of mercy, compassion, hospitality, and non-violence so evident in their resistance efforts.

With the Trocmes leading by example, it was hardly surprising that the residents of Le Chambon would embrace such a risky rescue mission with little thought as to whether it was the wisest thing to do. These character traits had become part of them. As a result, the “decision” to offer hospitality was largely instinctive and automatic.

- Share one thing that impacts you about this story?
- Share about your Challenge of the Week.

Luke 10:25-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan

Read through this passage twice, pausing at the end of each read for silent reflection.

Setting the scene

1. The winding mountain road between Jericho and Jerusalem was a dangerous walk – particularly if you travelled alone.
2. We are so familiar with this most well-known of parables – and with the term “Samaritan” – that it’s difficult to appreciate the full, shocking impact this story would have had on its Jewish hearers. In fact, it would have been offensive to them.
3. Luke strategically places this parable on Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem from Samaria, where seventy-two of his disciples had just been involved in a “mission”.

“Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share.”
Jean Vanier

Discuss

- Speculate why you think the religion scholar seeks to test Jesus?
- The religion scholar knew the Law backwards. He understood the connection between loving God and loving his neighbor. But *who* do you think he considered his neighbor?
- Share what you know about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans.
- In what ways do you think the actions of the Samaritan exhibit “generous hospitality”?
- We’re not Jewish and we don’t despise Samaritans. So what types of people would *we* be expected to hate/dislike/discriminate against – or at the very least be unconcerned about – particularly in our work context? (Or what types of people do we find it hardest to be compassionate toward?) Why might we feel this way?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- In this story there is a hospitality worker – the innkeeper. What opportunities do you think this person would have had to go beyond his paid role in caring for the injured man? What about your own context – have there been opportunities for you to care for guests in ways that go beyond what is expected of you?

Reflective meditation

Now take a minute or two to meditate on each of the following phrases out of the text. Let them wash over you and ask God to speak to you, specifically in regard to your work context:

“Who is my neighbour?”

“Filled with pity/compassion”

“I’ll pay you whatever else you need”

“Go and do the same”

- Share one thing that came to mind in your silent meditation.

Love is a verb

Even though the word is not used in the text, the story of the good Samaritan is a classic example of hospitality. Love, compassion, mercy – these words weave their way through the parable. The truth is that love is a verb more than it is a noun. The Samaritan’s compassion (“filled with pity”) leads him to *act* in mercy – just as it did for the people of Le Chambon.

In the New Testament, one of the key words describing this type of active love is *philoxenia*. In our English Bibles it is translated “hospitality”. But the Greek word – taken literally, is more helpful in understanding its full meaning.

The two root words combined here are *phileo* and *xenos*. *Phileo* means love – a particular type of love – for those we are related to. Love for our family.

Xenos is the Greek word for stranger – or alien.

Combine the two and we have a powerful and countercultural dynamic. It involves loving those who are very different to us, in the same way we love our own family.

This is very much part of the message of this parable: the scholar of religion would have assumed that the answer to his question “Who is my neighbour?” would be a fellow Jew – not a despised foreign heretic! Yet, Jesus turns things on their head. In his story, the person who expresses true (generous) hospitality is actually the stranger, not a Jew!

Discuss

- Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggemann defines “strangers” as “*people without a place*”. Make a list of words that describe the features of being a “stranger”? (If you struggle with this, try thinking of what it might be like for a newly arrived refugee.)
- “*Go and do the same*” – what might that mean for you?

Stranger Danger

We are often warned to be wary of people we don’t know or are different from us. Sometimes it’s hard to work out whether our fear of getting involved or acting on our compassion is because of genuine fears *or* a result of ignorance, even misinformation, about the person and their background.

“One cannot define one’s neighbor; one can only be a neighbor.” Heinrich Greeven

“Strangers” are people who don’t fit – who are not in their natural habitat. They know it and we know it.

The place a stranger finds him or herself in is an intensely vulnerable one. And because they are not familiar with how things operate in their new surroundings, they often feel powerless and lacking in the resources needed to thrive.

Think about a time in your life when you were most vulnerable. It may have been an overseas trip to a culture thoroughly different to our own – with completely different language, cultural traits. It could have been when you first came into your workplace and found everything strange and uncomfortable. Or it may have been a time when your whole world seemed to disintegrate before your very eyes – a loved one dying, a dream evaporating, a relationship turning ugly. All of these are times when we have little, if any, internal resources to cope with what we are experiencing.

The world of a stranger contains a fair measure of disorientation and disillusionment. This is particularly the case for refugees (where most of what was familiar is now all gone) but also true for the highly introverted workmate, foster child, psychiatric outpatient, prisoner, homeless, immigrant, or recent arrival etc.

Discuss

- Share a time you have been a “stranger”. What did/does it feel like? Was there anything or anyone that helped?
- The parable suggests that there can be risks and cost involved in giving hospitality to others. Do you have any personal experience where being hospitable in some way, has cost you?
- What are some of the fears you have in expressing welcome/love/care to people you don’t know and/or are very different to you?
- What are some of the fears you have in receiving welcome from people you don’t know and/or are very different to you?
- How might we go about sifting through our apprehensions and fears to determine which ones are based on real issues, and which are simply a result of the unknown?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- In your work, have you ever felt threatened, at risk, or taken advantage of? Does this experience or possibility affect how you go about your role, and if so, in what way/s?

Prayer

Here’s a prayer from *A New Zealand Prayer Book* you might like to use, to close your time together:

Lord, you have called us to serve you.

Grant that we may walk in your presence:

Your love in our hearts,

Your truth in our minds,

Your strength in our wills;

Until, at the end of our journey,

We know the joy of our homecoming

And the welcome of your embrace,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Challenge for the Week!

Prayerfully consider a way Jesus might be inviting you to step out of your comfort zone this week – i.e. take a risk! To do this, think of someone in your workplace you know is struggling in some way. Prayerfully consider one act of hospitality you could offer them this week that would express God’s love and care. This might mean inviting them for coffee, taking time to listen, chat and/or pray for them, inviting them out for a meal (or to home), offering to do a practical task for them etc.

If there are no obvious starting points for you, pray that God will give you the eyes to see an opportunity during the working week to be interrupted from what you are doing, to give attention to someone in need. This might be as simple as stopping to assist a new employee who is struggling to work out the photocopier, or taking a genuine interest in a customer.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

The Visitor (2007) 100 minutes

Summary: Walter is a recently widowed professor of economics from Connecticut, who travels down to Manhattan to stay in his city apartment while he is at a conference. He is startled to find a young couple living there. Tarek (a Syrian) and Zainab (a Senegalese) have in good faith rented it from a man who claimed it was his. The couple are both illegal immigrants. Although they have no place to go, they hastily pack and leave, but Walter decides to let them stay while they look for another place. Over the next few days, a friendship slowly develops. Tarek teaches Walter to play the djembe drum and they are each introduced to the other's world.



The Visitor explores a number of themes around hospitality, identity, cross-cultural communication, and immigration. All of this is set in the context of post-9/11 New York.

Some questions that may help you in your reflections and/or discussion are:

- It's clear that Walter has lost his sense of calling as a professor. He is just going through the motions. How does this display itself in his treatment of students and work colleagues?
- What are the features of Tarek, Zainab, and Mouna's lives as "strangers"?
- Walter appears as a very reluctant "host". Why do you think he decides to invite Tarek and Zainab to stay?
- In what ways are Tarek and Zainab "a gift" to Walter?
- In what ways is hospitality a two-way experience for Walter, Tarek, Zainab, and Mouna?
- Being vulnerable, powerless, and resourceless are three common themes for those who are "strangers". How is each of these visible in the lives of Tarek and Zainab?
- Generous hospitality is only truly possible when we attempt to put ourselves in the position of the other – and see things through their world. What allows this process to occur in this story?
- True hospitality cannot help but leave both parties unchanged. Reflect on how all the key characters in this story were changed by their experience together.
- Speculate on how Walter's experience with Tarek, Zainab, and Mouna might end up changing the way he viewed his job as a professor.

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- If you can, share an experience where you have “received” from your guest/s. How has this changed you and the way you understand your role?

Read Luke 10:25-37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan)

- In what ways do you think the actions of the Samaritan exhibit “generous hospitality”?
- We’re not Jewish and we don’t despise Samaritans. So what types of people would we be expected to hate/dislike/discriminate against? What types of people do we find it hardest to be compassionate toward? Particularly think about your workplace or industry. Why might we feel this way?



WEEK 4: MAKING ROOM FOR OTHERS

The first two years of my time at university were spent living at Knox College – an all-male Presbyterian hall of residence in Dunedin. Knox was modelled on the college system of the great British universities and purported to offer much more than that of a hostel, which is why most students stayed there for multiple years of their university careers. Tutorials, chapel services, cultural and sporting events – these were all features of Knox life.

The imposing red brick building stands like an English castle on a hill in Dunedin North. Through the main doors is an ornate staircase, extending up several floors through the turret at the center of the building.

In particular, dining at Knox was quite the experience. The food at Knox was outstanding and nothing like the slop most students complain about from their university days. Mrs. Brown, the Matron, was a kindly woman, with a knack of providing consistently high quality meals as well as relating to us in a winsome and motherly way. She was gold.

The dining room (known as The Great Hall) was an architectural masterpiece, complete with large stained glass windows and chandeliers. At one end of the dining room was an elevated table around which the Master (head of the College) and the Fellows of the Upper Common Room (young scholars and tutors) sat. Behind them sat an impressive stag head on the wall.

During weeknights, Knox residents were required to wear a collared shirt, tie, and jacket to dinner. Never mind what you wore on the bottom half, with guys frequently turning up in shorts or jeans, and sandals. Of the regular meals, Sunday lunch was the most formal of occasions. All residents were expected to wear a suit, and the college was generally in full attendance.

It was the custom of the Master and the Upper Common Room members to always be last to enter the Great Hall. Everyone stood and then the Master said grace – in Latin.

Eating at Knox was a world away from what I experienced at Prem Dan in Kolkata, India, years later.

Like so many people from around the world, my daughter and I found ourselves volunteering at one of the Missionaries of Charity homes for a few days.

When the Master in Jesus’s Parable of the Great Banquet commanded his servant to go out and invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” to his feast, that’s exactly what Mother Teresa and her fellow nuns have done.

Our daily routine as volunteers was simple, yet profound. We gathered at the Mother House at 6.00am for Mass with the sisters. Then a simple breakfast of bread, bananas, and chai, followed by a prayer. Catching crowded buses, we took off to serve in the various homes run by the order.

Prem Dan (meaning “a gift of love”) is a home for those men and women who are struggling with major health issues - folk who likely would have already died on the streets of Kolkata, if not for the hospitality of the sisters.

Here I found myself, sweating profusely in the humid heat, washing laundry, and serving and feeding men who were the very poorest of the poor – face-to-face with people whose physical and emotional needs were so starkly visible.

I tried to remind myself that each person I was serving had a story, a life prior to these last months and years. Communication was difficult – as most didn’t speak a word of English and I certainly didn’t speak Hindi. A smile here, an acknowledgement there, an offer of help. It wasn’t very much at all – but this was all I had to offer in the face of such overwhelming need. I recalled the words of Jesus, “*Whatever you do to the least of these, you do it to me.*”

- Share any thoughts or insights you have from this story.
- Share what happened in your Challenge for the Week.

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- In your work, have you encountered any “Mrs. Brown’s”? What was it about the person that inspired or impressed you? Do you think such people are just naturally gifted, or have they learnt the art of being such warm hosts?

Luke 14:1-24 The Parable of the Great Banquet

Lectio Divina (divine reading) is an ancient practice of reading Scripture in a way that helps us to hear what the Spirit might be saying to us – individually and as a group. As a form of Lectio Divina, have one person in your group read the story slowly, three times – with a break for reflection between each reading.

First reading: familiarize yourself with the overall story. Let it wash over you.

Second reading: look for a word or a phrase that particularly sticks out to you.

Speak out this word or phrase during the time of reflection following the reading. (Don’t attempt to explain why you have chosen the particular phrase – simply voice it.)

Third reading: ask yourself “What most impacts/speaks to you in this story?”

Share your response during the time of reflection following the reading. Again, don’t explain why – simply voice it.

Now let’s look at the passage a little more closely.

Setting the scene

1. Jewish culture had very rigid rules – including ones around who you should and shouldn't dine with. Jesus seems to have regularly disregarded these social rules, which of course made those who viewed them important – particularly the religious leaders – hostile toward him. According to them, Jesus was hanging around with the wrong type of people.
2. Here we find Jesus invited to a “society meal”, hosted by a leading Pharisee and likely attended by a bunch of other important folk. It's unclear whether the person with dropsy (swelling of the body) was a fellow guest or someone uninvited who came to see Jesus while he was dining.
3. There was a lot of prestige involved in being seated close to the host at a meal like this, and clearly there has been some jostling for position between the guests.

Discuss

- Why do you think the other guests “were keeping a close eye on (Jesus)” at the meal?
- What are some of the subtle (and not so subtle) games you have seen played by people to reinforce their social, positional, or economic status?
- How do you see some of these games played out in your workplace and/or industry?
- Share any challenges you have in being “fully present” to people in your company – rather than caught up in your own needs, thoughts or workload. To help, you may like to think of a particular work function you've been at (or hosted) recently. To what degree were you “other-focused”? Were you pre-occupied by your own “stuff” (e.g. the need to impress others, mind on other things, avoidance of certain people, disinterest in engaging, too busy on your smartphone etc.)? If so, in what ways was it a barrier to being fully present?
- The Parable of the Great Dinner seems to have two levels of meaning to it. The first one is an allusion to an invitation to the Great Banquet at the end of the age. Why do you think it's so often those of us who have the least going for them in this life who are most responsive to Jesus' invitation?
- The second layer of meaning is a much more literal interpretation. Eugene Peterson puts verse 13 this way, “*Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks.*” Have you ever felt like a “misfit”? Why? Can you think of particular people in your world –workplace, neighborhood, church etc. – who may feel they are “misfits”?
- What do you think are some of the barriers or challenges to eating with those who are “strangers” to you? Think of the challenges for both you and them.

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- In what ways can you be more “present” to the needs of your guests? Can doing so sometimes get in the way of undertaking your core role?

Making room for others

Hospitality is about making space for others. Not just at our meal tables, but in the whole of our lives – including our places of work. Inviting people into not only our homes, but also our hearts.

To do this, we need to be “fully present”. That is, our whole attention has to be given to them. Yet too often we are distracted by our own stuff, our own needs, our own agenda.

True hospitality is not about us. It is about “the other” – the one we are making space for. This requires humility and “other-centeredness”.

“The sign that we are practicing the presence of people is that we ... find ourselves seeing things about them that we never noticed before, understanding them from the inside out, tenderly identifying with their weaknesses, and marveling at their larger-than-lifeness.” Mike Mason

I love the metaphor of an embrace that the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf uses in his book *Exclusion & Embrace*, to describe what welcoming others into our space is about. Volf notes that there are four distinct movements to an embrace:

The opening of the arms

“Open arms are a sign that I have created space in myself for the other to come in.” They are an invitation.

The waiting

“The other person cannot be coerced or manipulated into an embrace.”

The invitation must be reciprocated. Waiting gives opportunity for the other person to choose whether or not they wish to respond.

The closing of the arms

The actual embrace is, of course, the goal. But “it takes two pairs of arms for one embrace”. Each must enter the other’s space and feel the other’s presence. To do so, “a soft touch is necessary” – so as not to crush the other.

The opening of the arms again

Releasing the other person is the last movement – freeing them to be the person they are, rather than the person we want them to be.

Volf suggests that a true embrace cannot leave either person unchanged. This was certainly my experience at Prem Dan. And it was also the strongest memory of have of Mrs. Brown – the matron at Knox College.

Discuss

- What element of the embrace metaphor is most helpful for you?
- What are some ways we can “create space for others” in our workplaces?
- Can you think of any acts of hospitality you have given, received, or observed, where there has been coercion or manipulation? What was the effect?
- How can our hospitality (welcoming the stranger) be empowering and give dignity, rather than coercive or patronizing?
- Reflect on the power dynamics in your workplace. How could some of this be dissipated, so that generous hospitality was able to flourish and empower?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- What, if any, power dynamics have you observed in your workplace – either between guests, or between staff, or between guests and staff? What role, if any, do you feel you could play to subvert these power or status games?

Prayer

Here’s the prayer offered each morning by the volunteers at the Missionaries of Charity:

Dear Lord, the great healer; we kneel before You

Since every good and perfect gift must come from You, we pray:

Give skill to our hands

Clear vision to our minds

Kindness and meekness to our hearts

Give us singleness of purpose

Strength to lift up part of the burden of our suffering fellow men and women

And a true realization of the privilege that is ours.

Take from our hearts all guile and worldliness, that with the simple faith of a child, we may rely on You. Amen.

“A good host is not only able to receive his guests with honor and offer them all the care they need but also to let them go when their time to leave has come.” Henri Nouwen

Challenge for the week!

The challenge this week is to seek to “make room for” and be “fully present” to someone at work. Plan some time with them so that you can chat, particularly seeking to open your heart and hear their story and how things are for them. Ask God to give you ears to hear what is really happening for them – their hopes, fears, dreams, disappointments, and struggles.

You may like to do this through inviting the person out for coffee, or to a ballgame – or maybe just lingering a little longer in the staffroom. Whatever context is appropriate and unthreatening for the person and you.

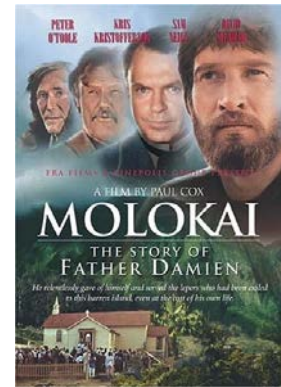
Spend some time praying for the person in the day or two after you’ve met with them.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Molokai: the story of Father Damien (1999) 113 minutes

Summary: Based on the true story of a Belgian priest who volunteered to minister to the leper colony on the remote Hawaiian island of Molokai. For sixteen years Father Damien helped transform a despairing, suffering, and chaotic settlement into a place of hope, beauty, and compassion. His generous hospitality resulted in Damien eventually contracting leprosy himself. He died in 1888.

Molokai explores a number of themes around physical and social suffering, prejudice and fear, compassion and hope.



Some questions that may help in your reflections and/or discussion are:

- The bishop's final instruction to Father Damien before he departs for Molokai is "*Remember – you are not to touch anyone...*" What is the role of human touch in offering generous hospitality? What part did this play in Damian's care of the people of Molokai? What difference did his disregard for the bishop's advice make? And what was the cost?
- Can you recall an incident in the gospels where Jesus also took a risk with a person with leprosy? What happened?
- What are the various ways Damian offered generous hospitality to the people of Molokai?
- In what way did the chapel become a house of hospitality? How did this happen?
- Discuss the dynamics between Damian and his religious superiors, and the political authorities. What do you think was driving most of the tension?

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- Are there any risks to your health or safety in your work? How do you feel about them and does or should this affect the way you approach your role and relate to guests?

Read Luke 14:1-24 (The Parable of the Great Banquet).

- How do you think Damian would have understood this?



WEEK 5: RECOGNISING JESUS

Several years ago, our family visited my brother and his family in Canada. They live on the outskirts of Toronto, in what used to be a small town that has now been virtually swallowed up into the growing metropolis.

Like many small towns surrounding large cities, their municipality is now nearly unrecognizable from what it was fifty years ago. Strip shopping, garish neon signs, miles of roads, and extensive new subdivisions dominate the once quiet village.

David and Kim, though, are fortunate to live in a house in the original part of town, which retains its old character, just two blocks off Main Street. At the front of their century-old villa is a veranda. It fits the character of the surrounding houses, most of which have similar spaces.

In the intense, humid heat of a Southern Ontario summer, it became our habit to sit out on the veranda first thing in the morning and after dinner (supper). In the evenings, neighbors would often walk by – sometimes with a dog in tow – and it was natural and easy to engage in chit-chat with them. I quickly grew to enjoy the relaxed times sitting on the veranda, watching the world go by, sipping coffee, reading the paper, and engaging in chatter with both family members and passers-by.

All this got me thinking: why was it that houses of this vintage had front verandas but more recently designed homes ignored such spaces, often instead choosing to build a double garage (with an automatic door) on the front of the house facing the street?

The contrast between these two radically different uses of front yard space says a great deal about our changing priorities for the way we do life. It's not that outdoor living spaces have been dismissed. It's just that these important areas are now almost always built in the *back* yard – deliberately positioned in order to maximize privacy and be as far away from prying eyes as possible.

The most visible, neighbor-connected space in our properties is now dominated by the car. And the preference of many people is to gain access to their homes or places of work without having to step outside either the private bubble of their vehicle. Little wonder then, that many people haven't even talked with some neighbors in their street or their office, even though they've lived there or worked with them for several years.

In contrast, I think what I like so much about the front veranda is the connection it gives with the neighborhood. It acts as a kind of bridge between the more private space of the house and the public space of the street. It allows people to engage with those who live close by in an open, hospitable way.

Our move to much more secluded outdoor living space in our houses is symptomatic of the rapid move to seeing home as a private retreat from “the world”.

I admit that left to my own devices I would opt for a secluded, tidy and well-ordered life. Fortunately God – and my wife (in case you’re wondering, they *are* distinct entities) – have conspired to spoil me for such a tame, safe, and cloistered existence. First there were young adults living with us. Then came our children. Following hard on the heels of our own little balls of messiness were foster children. Then, when I’d finally negotiated the child-rearing years, any thought I might have had that our home was about to enter the peaceful bliss of emptiness was shattered. That’s when we invited other adults to move in with us.

What happened to my dream of a predictable, peaceful and regulated home life? I wish I could say that my vain yearnings for such tranquility have vanished. Alas, they still echo in my ears from time to time – mainly when things are too intense and challenging and I just want to run away from it all.

The cultural dreams we find planted and watered in our imagination are difficult to uproot and replace. I am living proof of this. In my best moments I revel in the truth that our home life is far more deeply enriched by experiencing the life and energy of others in our midst.

Our attempts to maximize our privacy and live as discrete individuals, inevitably lead us to make our homes into retreats – refuges or havens from life. It’s easy to give in to the cultural pressure to separate off our more public roles from our private life. Often I hear Christians say, “My job is so intense that I need my home life to be a haven – completely free of any expectation to relate to or serve others.” Home is viewed almost entirely as a sanctuary, a place to extract oneself from work and community life.

Homes *should* be a place of safety, rest, and nurture. There is a time to close the front door and just rejuvenate as a family or individual. Jesus took regular time out to be by himself and also had times where it was just he and his core disciples. These were important times of replenishment and re-focus. ————— —

However, the rhythm of rest was in order to re-engage. What’s more, there were occasions when he allowed his solitude to be interrupted by the needs pressing in upon him. In fact, several of his most significant times of ministry appear to have been unscheduled interruptions.

Rather than treating our homes primarily as retreats, we would be better *also* viewing them as springboards to community and mission. Perhaps rather than treating the whole of our home as largely “off-limits” to others, we might do better to understand certain spaces in the house as useful for retreat – and other spaces for hospitality. This would give room for a more integrated understanding and use – one where our homes contain opportunities for both retreat *and* hospitality. A haven *as well as* a springboard to mission.

Discuss

- Share something that impacted you from this reflection.
- How do you view your own home? Is it primarily as a retreat or a place of hospitality?
- Thinking about your work context, what might this reflection suggest regarding the various physical spaces involved in your office, factory, school, hospital, practice rooms, restaurant/café, or retail shop?
- Share how things went for you in your Challenge of the Week.

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- Physical space is very important to venues for hospitality. Think about the space/s you work in. In what ways do they assist or work against your objective of guests feeling welcome and healthy interaction taking place? What would/could you do to improve the space?

Luke 24:13-35 The Road to Emmaus

Read the passage through twice, pausing after each reading for silent reflection.

Setting the scene

It was an expectation in the ancient world that a traveller be offered lodging and food – particularly the later in the day it was. Roads were dangerous at night and protection was part of the obligation to be hospitable. It was also polite for the traveller to not ask for such hospitality. However, it was unusual for the guest to take the initiative in breaking the bread and giving thanks for it. That was the role of the host.

Reflection

Here are four brief excerpts from the passage. Choose one or two and spend some time meditating on them, imagining you were part of the story. As you do this, try to listen to what God might be saying to you. If you are in a group, finish by briefly sharing your thoughts.

“They stopped short, sadness written across their faces.”

“Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, ‘Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.’ As they sat down to eat, [Jesus] took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them.”

“Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

“Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?”

Discuss

- Why do you think the two followers were kept from recognizing Jesus?
- What “changed” for Cleopas and the other follower?
- If you can, share a time when God spoke to you (or made himself known to you) in a way that changed you or brought clarity.

Where do we recognize Jesus?

Luke is careful to note it was in the breaking of bread that the two followers finally recognized who they had welcomed in. Jesus comes to Cleopas and the other follower as a stranger. It’s only during the meal that they comprehend who they are hosting.

It brings to mind the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25). When the king says to the “righteous ones”, *“For I was hungry, and you fed me...I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home...”* they expressed surprise – *“Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you?... Or a stranger and show you hospitality?...”*

The answer from the king has reverberated down through the history of the church. And it was taken particularly seriously – even literally – by the Christians of the early centuries: *“Whenever you did this to the least of these, you did it to me”*. This was the mandate for believing that when they gave generous hospitality to those on the margins, it was as if they were entertaining Jesus.

So, where do we recognize Jesus? According to the parable, it is in the face of those we offer hospitality to.

Discuss

- In what way might it change our approach to hospitality in the workplace if we understood we were in fact serving Jesus?

Home and work-based hospitality

It’s intriguing to note how many of the incidents recorded in the gospels occur within a home or workplace environment. In fact, it seems fitting that this incident in Emmaus is the first recorded meal after the resurrection.

Even though Jesus had no regular home himself, he was often invited to eat or sleep at someone’s place. And on more than one occasion, he actually took the initiative and invited himself to a person’s home!

The Emmaus story – and others like it – hints of much less differentiation between home, work, and wider community life. Of course, we see this in evidence everywhere through the New Testament. Most church gatherings were held in homes. And most workplaces were closely linked to the home. Some historians like Michael Green, even suggest that it was this more open use of the home that was a key to the gospel spreading like wildfire across the Empire. Home-based hospitality enabled both community and mission to thrive.

A place to welcome others is a central biblical reason for the home and workplace. Of course, it’s not the only place we can express hospitality, nor is the welcoming of others the only purpose for a place of work or a home. Nevertheless, we may need to be reminded that the home – and the workplace – are not ends in themselves.

So those of us who follow Jesus have to think carefully how we can open up our homes and workplaces to be hospitable.

Discuss

- Why is it that we are often so fiercely protective about of own “space” at home or work?
- If you were to make your home or workplace more hospitable, what might need to change?

Prayer

A time of open prayer, inviting Jesus to lead and show himself more clearly to us.

Challenge for the week!

There’s two parts to your challenge for this week:

Firstly, spend some time prayerfully considering how you could use your workplace more intentionally to be a place of welcome for others. Particularly focus on what might be a manageable starting point. Ask God to inspire you to plan a first/next step. (Note that even if you are not the boss or manager of your workplace, you still have much influence in helping it to be a place of hospitality.)

It is the guests who are the measure of a home. When guests are fully welcome, they share the home.” David Matzko McCarthy

Secondly, give some concerted thought to planning a meal with a “stranger” or “strangers” sometime soon – a new colleague, a marginalized or undervalued workmate, a customer or client who you sense is struggling. You may like to do this with some or all of the others in your group. Who could you invite? What might make it easier for them to accept your invitation? What would be good to do to make the time welcoming and enjoyable for your guests? Make a plan and ask God to help you put it into action.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Les Misérables (2012) 158 minutes

Summary: Victor Hugo’s masterful novel *Les Misérables* has been made into several movies, as well as one of the great musicals of all time. This most recent of film productions is a combination of both. The redemptive tale is set in the harsh struggle of early nineteenth France. It centres around Jean Valjean, a man who has spent nineteen years in hard labour for stealing a loaf of bread. Released on parole, Valjean quickly discovers the hopeless life a released convict faces – where no one will house or employ him. He is an outcast. And then, a remarkable act of hospitality changes everything...



- In what ways is the Bishop of Digne’s welcome of Jean Valjean transformational for the parolee?
- The story is full of acts of hospitality and inhospitality. Discuss some of these and what struck you most about them.
- Inspector Javert sincerely believes he is doing God’s will by enforcing justice. However, he unwittingly is deeply inhospitable – with no room for grace and compassion. Those of us who are committed to Christianity can also often come across as unwelcoming and harsh. Why do you think this is the case? Is there anything we can do to change this?
- An integral part of welcoming others is knowing when to also let them go. Valjean faces this with Cosette. What do you think gives him the grace to do so? And what challenges does he have in letting go?
- In the end, what is it that renders Javert unable to reconcile the actions of Valjean?

Read Luke 24:13-35 (The Road to Emmaus). Take a moment to reflect on each of the following parts of the story.

“They stopped short, sadness written across their faces.”

“Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, ‘Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.’ As they sat down to eat, [Jesus] took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them.”

“Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

“Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?”



WEEK 6: THE ULTIMATE ACT OF HOSPITALITY

The door of the bunker slammed shut. The ten naked, condemned men inside knew they would never emerge alive from their starvation cell. The taunt of the SS jailer rang in their ears – “You will dry up like tulips.”

Nine of the men were selected to die by the brutal camp commandant, punished for the successful escape of a fellow inmate. Nine had been selected – but one had volunteered.

His name: Maximilian Kolbe. Age: 45. Occupation: monk. Nationality: Polish.

It was a death that other Auschwitz prisoners dreaded – a lingering agony without a drop of water or a crumb of food. Maximilian Kolbe had had no need to offer himself for such a death.

But he did. Not as a way out of the horrors of the camp, not as an escape from the terror which stalked every prisoner’s life – there were simpler ways of ending it all – but to save the life of another.

It was mid-1941 and the tide of war was running the Germans’ way. In the evil web of Nazi concentration camps, the violent treatment of inmates became still more barbaric as the machinery of mass murder was refined. When a prisoner escaped, a system of collective responsibility was enforced. As punishment, men living in the same block were picked out to die in a starvation bunker.

Under the heat of a sultry day at the end of July, men from Barracks 14 – Father Kolbe’s block – stood on the camp street all day tortured by sun, hunger (their last “meal” had been the previous evening), and fear. A prisoner had escaped from a farming detail and they knew what to expect.

It was said that men condemned to the starvation bunker didn’t even look like human beings after a day or two. Their throats turned to raspy paper, their brains turned to fire and their intestines dried up and shriveled like desiccated worms.

Barracks 14 waited, waited, waited for the inevitable sentences. Finally, at about seven o’clock in the evening, they came. Deputy Camp Commandant Karl Fritsch and his assistant Gerhard Palitsch inspected the silent rows of emaciated figures and began selecting victims for the reprisal deaths.

One of the prisoners chosen shouted out in despair, “My poor wife and children!” He was Franciszek Gajowniczek, a Polish sergeant.

Suddenly a frail figure stepped out of line, took off his cap and moved with halting gait to stand at attention before the SS men. He had a flushed face, sunken eyes and cheeks and wore round glasses in wire frames.

Prisoners craned to see because although such desperate cries were not uncommon, no-one had ever dared to break rank. It was probably this that kept Kolbe from being shot where he stood: his action was incomprehensible.

Fritsch, who had never before had conversation with a prisoner, asked: “What does this Polish pig want? Who are you?”

Kolbe replied, “I am a Catholic priest. I want to die for that man; I am old, he has a wife and children.” It was a shrewd answer tailored to the Germans’ philosophy of eliminating as priority the old and the weak.

Fritsch signaled Sergeant Gajowniczek to return to his place in the line and Palitsch, without a sign of emotion, changed the prisoner numbers on his death list.

Kolbe was led away, supporting one of the other men marked to die. Later, Gajowniczek said, “I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me – a stranger. Is this some dream, or reality?”

The other prisoners thanked God it wasn’t them being led off to this drawn-out death. But after the shock of their own survival, the realization of Kolbe’s sacrifice began to sink in.

A fellow prisoner recalled: “It was on everybody’s lips, not just Poles. Czechs, Austrians, people of all nationalities – even the Germans – were dumbfounded and exclaimed, ‘This is genuine love of neighbor!’ because no-one had ever volunteered to die before.

“On the contrary, everyone held on to life to its last threads – and here Father Maximilian gave away, not a piece of his bread or even all of his soup, but his very life for another. And such a death. In starvation like that, one has to give oneself up bit by bit, web by web, knowing for sure that one is perishing ... To do it and not break down completely...”

Far from breaking down, Kolbe’s faith made the death cell a place of hope and triumph over the inhuman brutality of the prison regime.

The condemned men were on a cement-floor, in a cell completely devoid of furniture except for a bucket for relieving themselves. The foul air was horrible. They were in a frenzy, knowing they would never return to their homes and families. They were screaming in despair and cursing, until Father Kolbe pacified them. So they could join him, he prayed aloud.

His voice could be heard in nearby cells, where other victims joined in.

“From then on, every day, from the cell where these poor souls were joined by the adjoining cells, one heard the recitation of prayers, the rosary and hymns. Father Kolbe led while the others responded as a group.

“As these fervent prayers and hymns resounded in all corners of the bunker, I had the impression I was in a church ... Sometimes Father Kolbe’s group was so deeply absorbed in prayer that they didn’t notice the SS opening the door ...”

The extent of their suffering can be imagined from the fact that the urine bucket was always dry. In their horrifying, all-consuming thirst, the prisoners must have drunk its contents.

Father Kolbe never asked for anything and never complained. He looked directly and intently into the eyes of those entering the cell. The SS men couldn’t stand his glance and used to yell at him, “Shau auf die Erde, nicht auf uns!” (Look at the ground, not at us). Nevertheless, they admired his courage and behavior.

As the prisoners weakened, the prayers continued, but in whispers. Two weeks went by and only four prisoners remained alive, including Father Kolbe, who was still conscious. The SS killed them all by lethal injection. Father Kolbe, with a prayer, held out his arm to the executioner.

A fellow prisoner later commented: “No similar event ever took place at Auschwitz before or after, nor did I ever hear of anything like it in the other concentration camps ... It was an enormous shock to the whole camp.

“We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. A person unknown, like everyone else tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him ...”

“Good hosts do not recoil from human suffering, they are willing to be present and share burdens even when they cannot solve problems. They do not insist on quick evidences of success, but rather understand the small acts of grace.” Christine Pohl

- Share your reaction to this story?
- In what ways does Father Kolbe’s actions display generous hospitality?
- Share how your planning is going for your upcoming meal with a stranger/strangers, or any thoughts you’ve had about using your workplace or home more for hospitality.

Question specific to those in the hospitality industry

- The soldiers were very definitely agents of inhospitality. Where have you seen inhospitable behavior and attitudes within your workplace? How can this be challenged or fought against? What does the example of Father Kolbe have to teach us, in this regard?

The Last Supper

Read Luke 22:7-30 together.

Setting the scene

1. Water jars/pitchers were almost always carried by women, so a man doing so would have been easily identifiable.
2. Any homeowner who had a second story with a “large” upstairs room would have been relatively wealthy.

Discuss

- Why do you think Jesus was so eagerly looking forward to this meal? (v. 14)
- The argument among the disciples about who would be the greatest (verse 24) has a familiar ring to it. Just a few chapters before (Luke 14) Jesus had castigated some of his fellow guests at a meal, for jockeying for position (remember – this is the passage we looked at in Week 4). What do you think is the main point Jesus is making here about hospitality?
- What meal is Jesus referring to when he says in verse 30 “...*the right to eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom*”? Why do you think Jesus might have said this to the disciples?

Jesus as host *and* meal

It’s worth remembering that at the heart and center of the Christian life is a meal – the Eucharist. Of course, this “meal” which Jesus commanded his disciples to participate in as often as they meet in remembrance of him, is heavily pregnant with all kinds of meaning – and deeply transformative. And it models for us the very heart of hospitality.

**“People who have never experienced need or marginality, or who are uncomfortable with their own vulnerability, often find it easier to be hosts than guests. But the helper must also be able to receive, especially from those who look as if they have little to offer.”
Christine Pohl**

It offers the sustenance we need (through partaking in the “flesh and blood” of Christ, as John puts it) in order to “do the will of the Father” – to let our daily lives be one long act of worship.

It also expresses the generous hospitality of the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – who live in perfect community and invite us to join them in table fellowship and partnership. And it reminds us that we are to welcome others in the same way.

It acts as a kind of regular commissioning – to send us back out into the everyday world of work and home as representatives and carriers of God’s grace, love, and hospitality.

It gives us a foretaste of the Great Banquet – when we experience God’s life in full measure, when there will be no more hunger or lack – physical or otherwise. This is the long-awaited feast marking the end of this age and the full realization of God’s kingdom.

And this sacrament reminds us that while Jesus is our generous *host* (the one who welcomes us), in some mystical way he is also our very *meal* – the bread and wine we eat and drink of. Host and Meal. Both the model of hospitality and the provision of hospitality.

A meal of self-giving

Read through Luke 22: 14-23 again, twice.

During the first reading, let it wash over you.

As the passage is read the second time, allow yourself to be drawn to a particular phrase or sentence.

After the second reading, spend two or three minutes in silent meditation. Let the phrase or sentence you were drawn to speak to you.

Discuss

- Share the phrase you dwelt on. If you can, explain why this captured your attention and what you think God might be saying to you through it – particularly in regard to your place of work.
- In what way do you think Jesus’ impending death is the ultimate act of hospitality?
- What is your own experience of receiving Jesus’ “ultimate act of hospitality”? What difference has this made for you personally? And for you in relating to others?
- Share any ways your offering of hospitality (to each other, or to the “stranger”) might change as a result of these past few weeks together.

Prayer

Spend time praying for each other – particularly in regard to what has been shared in the Final Reflections.

Challenge for the week!

How’s that planning for your meal going?

Remember, this is a very tangible way you can express generous hospitality to a stranger or strangers you encounter in your work.

Pray in advance, asking God to be tangibly present. Expect God to do something beautiful as you step out in faith.

Bon appetit!

FOR FURTHER READING

These last six weeks may have stirred a longing in you to explore further the life of generous hospitality God calls us to participate in. Two books that may help you are:

Making Room: recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition by Christine Pohl (Eerdmans)

Practicing the Presence of People by Mike Mason (Waterbrook)

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Amish Grace (2010) 88 minutes

Summary: Based on the true story of the response from a Pennsylvania Amish community when five of its children are gunned down and killed in their schoolhouse in 2006. Through the eyes of a grieving mother, Ida Graber, and other devastated families, this movie explores the Amish's astonishing reaction to the horrific shootings - of forgiveness and compassion.



- What impacted you most from this story?
- What are some of the surprising ways hospitality is expressed in this story? Are there any inconsistencies – ways in which there is also inhospitality?
- In response to the leader of the Amish community saying, *“We harbor no grudge”*, the TV news reporter said, *“I don’t know what to do with this?”* Why do you think the offer of forgiveness is so counter cultural?
- Ida (Mary Beth’s mother) says to her husband, *“I will not betray my daughter by forgiving the man who killed her.”* Why do we often struggle with the tension between justice and love/forgiveness?
- Why do you think Gideon struggled so much with what to do with Ida’s anger and grief?
- The leader of the Amish community says, *“Forgiveness comes from an open heart and it comes without condition, or it does not come at all.”*

What role does forgiveness play in generous hospitality?

- What about the beliefs of the Amish community do you find challenging to your own perspective? What elements do you struggle or disagree with?

Read Luke 22:7-30 (The Last Supper)

- In what way do you think Jesus’ impending death is the ultimate act of hospitality?
- What is your own experience of receiving Jesus’ “ultimate act of hospitality”? What difference has this made for you personally? And for you in relating to others?
- Share any ways your offering of hospitality (to each other, or to the “stranger”) might change as a result of these past few weeks together.