

Luke 14:12-13 “Re-Thinking Hospitality”

Every now and then I feel like it's good to give you all a little peek into how your pastor does things. For the most part, I work about 2 months ahead of time with my preaching schedule. But there's my disclaimer too: "Sermon titles and scriptures subject to change as the Spirit leads." That lets me switch things up when more pressing things come up in the news that require the response of a spiritual leader. "Plan ahead be flexible," right?

What's great, though, is when something comes up and the scripture and sermon title I chose two or three months ago *still works!* See, I was ready to talk about the Safe Space Shelter and how happy I am that we agreed to open up our church again this year. I was going to talk about how this is a prime example of that "radical hospitality" we're shooting for as a church. Radically hospitable churches are more likely to thrive than ones who don't. Then all of a sudden the subject of hospitality as it relates to refugees started making front-page headlines. But guess what? The scripture and sermon title still applies! That's Holy Spirit stuff right there.

Here's the thing though ... some folks think I get a little too political in my sermons when things come up in the news. This is funny, because a large number of my colleagues in ministry think I'm not political enough! But here's the thing -- I've never voted for a person just because they belong to a particular political party, nor do I tow party lines when it comes to voting on legislature. It's not my business to tell people how to vote. I'm a big fan of the Johnson Amendment. Keep state matters out of church and church matters out of state. Mind you, if something comes up that's just plain immoral or evil, yeah ... I'm going to call it out, especially if it's something the prophets, the apostles, and especially Jesus addressed in the Bible. See, my motto when it comes to politics is, "Don't let your politics shape the gospel, let the gospel shape your politics."

So ... the subject on the table this morning is *still*, “Radical Hospitality.” In my view and in most biblical scholars’ view, it’s one of the biggest themes in the Bible. I checked with Rabbi Sarah down at Congregation Beth Israel just to make sure I’m right about the Jewish tradition’s understanding of radical hospitality as a major theme in the Old Testament. She not only assured me that I’m correct, but she also politely suggested that it’s a *much* bigger theme than *I* think it is. So ... basically I’m just going to be reading from the Bible this morning. I’ll give you a little background here and there so we don’t get lost, but I’m just going to give it to you straight out of the Bible. Here’s one thing you need to know before we get started -- The Biblical word “alien” can mean “stranger,” “refugee,” “outcast” and “immigrant” depending on which English translation you’re using. So with that -- “The word of God for the people of God” as they say in some traditions.

This is from **Genesis 12**. Abram who would eventually be known as “Abraham, the Father of Many Nations” for three world religions was living in the land of Ur, which in modern times is Western Iraq, when God called him. This is known as the Abrahamic Covenant --

Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages towards the Negeb. Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to *reside there as an alien*, for the famine was severe in the land.

This next passage is from **Genesis 23** after Abraham's wife Sarah died. Abraham was negotiating with the Hittites, the people who controlled the land, to see if he could bury his wife there.

Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, 'I am a *stranger and an alien residing among you*; give me property among you for a burying-place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.' The Hittites answered Abraham, 'Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold from you any burial ground for burying your dead.'

This is from Genesis 47. Abraham's son, Jacob, who God gave the name "Israel," was driven out of the land of Canaan because of yet another severe famine, and the Egyptians welcomed him.

God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, *in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him*. They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt.

After Jacob died, his son Joseph became friends with the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Israelites lived there in peace as resident aliens. But a generation later after Joseph died, the new Pharaoh was concerned that there were just too many Israelites living in Egypt, so his solution was to make them slaves. Eventually, a man named Moses rose up and convinced the next Pharaoh to free his people. But as the Hebrew people were moving out of Egypt, Pharaoh sent his army to kill them. That's when God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could cross over into the

Sinai wilderness to live as ... refugees. While they were refugees in the wilderness, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments which evolved into 613 edicts that would be referred to simply as “The Law.” Here’s a sample of some of those laws:

Exodus 12:49 and Leviticus 23:33 – “There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.”

Exodus 22:21 – “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for *you* were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Leviticus 19:9-10 – “You shall not strip your vineyards bare ... leave them for the poor and the alien.”

Leviticus 19:33-34 – “When aliens come to live with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

We’d be here all morning if I read the other 12, but I’ll throw in Deuteronomy 27:19 just for fun – “Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien of justice.”

Later when Israel became established as a Kingdom, King David thanked the refugees who lived among them for their help in building the temple. That’s in 1st Chronicles 22 and 29.

Much later, after a lot of political drama and bad Kings in Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated Israel’s armies at the Battle of Carchemish. Soon after, he began a 16 year process of deporting the leaders and wealthier citizens of Israel to Babylon. We call this the Babylonian Exile. During this time, a succession of prophets arose to give the Jewish exiles who were now resident aliens in *Babylon* some hope that they’d return home someday. They also encouraged the Babylonians to treat the Israeli exiles, who were now resident aliens, as

citizens. When they finally returned to their homeland, the prophets told the Israeli leaders how they should treat aliens who had moved into their land while they were gone. Jeremiah 7:5-7 “If you do not oppress the alien, then I will dwell with you in this place.” Jeremiah 22:3-5 “Do no wrong or violence to the alien.” Ezekiel 47:21-22 “The aliens shall be to you as citizens, and shall also be allotted an inheritance.” There are a *lot* more, but time’s running short, right? We haven’t even touched on the New Testament yet! Let’s see if we can hit some of the highlights though. Remember the child Jesus and his family were refugees when Herod drove them out of Bethlehem into Egypt. As an adult, Jesus reminded people, especially the Religious leaders who seemed to have forgotten about all of the scriptures that I just read, that we need to treat aliens justly. And of course, Jesus taught using stories or parables. His most notable story on the subject was about a King who separated nations like a shepherd would separate sheep and goats.

Matthew 25:34-40 tells what the King said to the “sheep side.” “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” But for the nations who ignored the stranger and the sick and the naked? Verse 41 – The King said, “Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Oh, good grief ... we have *no* time to go over the other half-dozen things that Jesus said about the matter, and I haven’t even touched Paul yet. But I’ve got to because some people say, “Well ... this is Paul ... he’s a

little more hard-core ... more pragmatic. He's the one we go to when we say, 'Well Jesus didn't say anything about that!'" Romans 12:13 "Extend hospitality to the strangers." Ephesians 2:11 – "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." Okay, how about Hebrews? Chapter 13:1-2 "Show hospitality to strangers, for in doing so, some have entertained angels." And of course, there are many more. But ... time's up. Time ... is ... up.

So ... thus concludes our reading from scripture. May God's blessing be on our understanding of this, God's Word. Thanks be to God.