

Genesis 18:1-15
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“It’s God at the Door”

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This year Ann and I began playing in an Open Jam Group in Milwaukee. Participants bring a wide variety of instruments including guitars, ukuleles, banjos, mandolins, a Melodica, Harmonicas, drums, sometimes violins and other instruments.

Some of the musicians are very talented and have performed on stage in the Milwaukee area, others barely know what we are doing with our instrument. The organizer Mark, whose heritage is Irish, calls the gathering a Session.

Session refers to a group of musicians playing and singing in the relaxed social setting. The performers offer traditional songs and tunes from a wide variety of cultural traditions.

During these sessions, anyone who is able to play music is welcome. The objective is not to provide music for an audience. A session is primarily a shared experience among the musicians, not a performance to be bought and sold.

The session unfolds as each musician selects a song to play, if others know the song they sing and play along. When their song is done the next person takes a turn.

The amazing thing about these Sessions, is everyone is welcome! All instruments, all talent levels, everyone! And in this busy world today, you are welcomed if you come occasionally or every week. It really is an extravagant act of hospitality.

As we look at the story from Genesis, we experience another extravagant act of hospitality. Abraham, as hospitality coordinator, kicks into motion when these strangers arrive. He tells Sarah and a couple of their servants to wash the visitors’ feet, make cakes, and prepare the calf. It is interesting how Abraham gets a lot of credit when all he really does is order people around, and Sarah and the servants do the work. That would not work in more liberated households today.

Still, acts of hospitality evoke stories and memories in many of us:

of open doors, we expected to be closed
of feeling radically welcomed, when we least expected it.
of being served with a hospitality more generous than we felt we deserved.

At our Wisconsin Conference Meeting last week, the delegates sought to make a decision in line with this biblical call for radical hospitality. After a healthy discussion, the delegates passed a resolution to name the WI conference an Immigrant Welcoming Conference.

The opening of the resolution spoke about the international refugee crises, and the struggles immigrants face when they arrive in a new country. But, the part of the resolution which convinced me to support it was the biblical section. If we take the bible seriously then we desire to allow it speak to our heart. Among the list of “Whereas” in the resolution was this biblical support...

WHEREAS the Jewish and Christian traditions honor Leviticus chapter 19 which states: “When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt” and

WHEREAS Jesus says, “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” And,

WHEREAS Jesus further says in Matthew 25 of those who will receive the kingdom, “When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me...”

Not only was I convinced to vote for this resolution because of these biblical references... I remembered times in my own life I walked into a new situation, new school, new church, new community, and I was welcomed. Entering through the door with nerves raging in full effect, doubts and confusion stirring, I was on guard not knowing what to expect; once, I was warmly welcomed by a few people, I could relax and let my guard down.

We don’t have to look far to understand how the Bible is full of tales of hospitality. Scripture is packed with open doors, gracious welcomes and great dinner parties. Scripture is filled with generous hosts and strange guests. New Testament stories record Jesus going out to dinner much more often than he goes to synagogue.

The grandfather of all these hospitality stories is this deliciously mysterious little story we heard about these visitors who appear at father Abraham's door. He's not exactly father Abraham yet. Not “father,” because there is still no heir, and in their old age, he and Sarah have given up. But they have not forgotten their manners.

Three uninvited visitors wander into their camp. They are welcomed and feasted, and then, after dinner they have a word to speak.

As the listener, we have been in on the secret about who these guests represent from way back in verse one. We know these are no simple desert vagabonds. We have been told that they are, by some mystery, the Lord himself, or if not God, at least messengers of God.

This strange hospitality tale makes sense at this deeper level. Time and again, openness, gracious welcome, and generous hospitality become occasions in which it is not only the

obvious guest who is received, but somehow it is God who is welcomed – God in the disguise of another.

Yet, like Abraham we don't know that it's really God. At first, we think it's our Young child annoying us to get more attention.

Like Abraham, we don't know that it's really God at the door. At first, we think it's the neighbor who always wants to argue social issues with us.

Like Abraham we don't know that it's God at the door. At first, we think it's somebody trying to convince us to buy something, or vote for someone, or sign a petition, and give us literature.

Like Abraham, we don't know that it's God at the door. At first, we think it's just our mother or father, wife or husband yearning for our precious time.

Like Abraham, we don't know that it's God. At first, we think it's some stranger entering our space with their strangeness.

On this Father's Day, let's take a lesson from Father Abraham and his household... It's only when we open the door, it's only when we offer the time, it's only when we give the love, spend the attention, "throw the feast" as it were, that we come to recognize that all along it's somehow God at the door.

Amen