

HOSPITALITY EXPRESSES HUMANITY

Some years ago I was shown some amazing hospitality in Malawi. The family I was visiting in Blantyre showed my wife and I to a bedroom scarcely big enough for the double bed with a mosquito net over it. The next morning I found that the host couple had slept in their tiny kitchen. In fact when I insisted on being asked to be shown where they slept they pointed to a spot under the kitchen sink. And they did this all with warmth and generosity.

I'm deeply troubled by the xenophobia which plagues our nation. It's an indictment against our so called Christian nation. It reduces us to the level of animalistic barbarism. It is a shame of our nation. It violates our very humanity. It is madness!!

Jesus was always showing hospitality where needed. He saw Nicodemus at night, He accepted the woman caught in the act of adultery, He invited himself to Zaccheus house and so on.

We all are basically immigrants having arrived in the southern point of Africa in different seasons.

Hebrews 13 v 1 – 3 Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

These words should form a crucial part of our manifesto in our cultural values. In Psalm 68 v 6 we are told that 'God places the lonely in families and leads the prisoners in singing but the rebellious live in a sun scorched land'.

In Genesis 17 and 18 we have Abraham showing hospitality to 3 strangers who turned out to be messengers from God.

Hospitality does 5 things for us:

1. It helps us break through our own fears and welcome the stranger
2. It transforms us from anxiety to courage, from suspicious owners to generous givers, and from closed mindedness to innovative ideas.
3. It helps us pay attention to the guest and breaks our preoccupations with self.
4. Hospitality makes space for our guest to find his own soul.
5. Hospitality opens windows of hope.

We are called to express the new humanity seen in Jesus which is the hope of the world. We simply cannot expect to prosper while rejecting the stranger. We need to work far more creatively and responsibly with the challenges that the needs of the foreigner present. We dare not let ineptitude or our fear prevent us from carrying the heart of Jesus concerning the strangers among us.

Receiving strangers is like receiving a gift which invites us to know and to be known. The deep despair and isolation that surrounds so many suicides today could be broken and remedied with gospel based hospitality. There was a student at Notre Dame university that committed suicide. When the authorities tried to find anyone who knew him he turned out to be a complete stranger to everyone on the campus. Many stories are told of people who have lived alone, died alone and have only been discovered some years later. The Ubuntu of our Christian faith invites us to run the risk of knowing and being known. Everyone has a story. Hospitality helps us to hear those stories and to share our

own. Just as my freedom ends where my brothers bondage begins so my prosperity too is contingent on being available to my neighbor and the foreigner. Riches may be measured by what you have. Wealth is measured by what you do with what you have.

The two big barriers to healthy hospitality are fear and prejudice leading to selfishness. We fear being exploited so we avoid hospitality. We judge superficially, expressing our prejudices.

Port Elizabeth is the Friendly City. Let us excel at that name and make this a safe haven for all. Let us do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

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