

Once I was a Stranger, BUT ...

This is Part 3 of a four sermon series preached at Forks Community Church. Scripture passages are in *italics*, my comments are normal type. Booklets are to be read in this order:

Now I am a child of God

Now I am in a family

Now I am reaching out to the stranger

Now I understand

The audio of the actual sermon can be heard on the Forks Community Church website,

<https://www.forkscommunitychurch.org/>



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Now I am reaching out to the stranger

Heb 13:1 *Let the relationship of loving your brother continue*
2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby
some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Don't forget those
who are in prison. Remember them as though you were in prison
with them. And don't forget those who are suffering. Remember
them as though you were suffering with them. 4 Let marriage be
held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled,
for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. 5 Keep
your life free from love of money, and be content with what you
have, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you."6
So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear;
what can man do to me?"7 Remember your leaders, those who
spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way
of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yester-
day and today and forever.

The Book of Hebrews is a different style than the letters, it is suggested that it was probably a sermon. So,

Chapter 13 is the 'What Next' section of the book of Hebrews.

Independent thoughts but also related to the big idea of living as a Christian. Living in light of the better things that have been brought about by the grace of God in Jesus Christ

We come back to the original meaning of hospitality. – Love for Strangers

Last week I expanded the 'Stranger idea' to include believers who we are not familiar with; legitimate and necessary for our fragmented culture. BUT, In its historical context, believers' lives revolved around one another much more

to the point there wouldn't have been strangers within the Christian community.

So, today we will think about the stranger, the foreigner, the out-

meaning of the passages.

It's not difficult to show someone that you care and to develop a relationship that has gospel conversations. Be genuine.

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We need to expand our vision of hospitality. It is not just something a specially gifted few people can do. It is not just entertaining close friends and relatives. This is natural, comfortable, safe

Luke 14:12 He said also to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Our houses and our food and everything we have is really the Lord's. it all belongs to the King.

Invite outsiders to the King's feast. What a privilege to invite others to the King's table Ask them questions about themselves. Talk about grace. Tell your story. Serve them. And then invite them to the ultimate feast.. It's sometimes surprising who will respond to His gracious invitation. Let us display revolutionary love through gospel hospitality.

We now know 12 families by name

5 families have been to our house for a meal

Not just us, when *** neighbors ask about all the men who showed up working on her house. Or the annual spring yard work event at the *** draws the attention of their neighbors, this is all ways that show something is different about these Christians

Believe what they talk about, love other people, care for one another like a family

One might raise the concern: But what about the gospel, are you just talking about social action, being a nice guy, a silent witness?

Not at all

Our work at *** and *** give them a perfect talking point.- why do people give up time and energy for them? Because Christ has made us part of a family and we serve God by loving and caring for each other. This opens the door for all kinds of things. That is the type of thing to make a lonely, skeptical American think.

At our house we behave the same whether there are believers or unbelievers there. We don't browbeat anyone or say you have to listen to a Gospel presentation or you don't get desert.

We just act normal. We pray before dinner. We bring God and biblical principles into our conversation. We answer questions as they come up. Yesterday as Karen helped a Muslim woman with a paper for college class I spent time holding their baby and talking to the husband about his perceived need. He is a chaplain at a hospital and serves all different faiths. His dilemma was what to do when someone asks him to pray. I suggested he have some passages from the Bible to read. For someone dying the 23rd Psalm and for a family that wanted a prayer, the Lord's prayer. We spent the rest of the time working on pronunciation and the

sider. The passage forces us in this direction:

Xenos refers to outsiders, not to those on the inside- those who are part of the family but just may not be as close.

Vs 2 refers to entertaining angels unaware. This suggests persons who were unknown to them and unlikely to be an obvious benefit

Vs 3 suggests 2 more groups to express love of strangers for; Remembering Prisoners and those suffering

Our society has changed a lot during my life time. Norms in both church and non church cultures have changed.

Who remembers this? **CLICK** Sunday school attendance awards;

Got a bar for perfect attendance to SS year -Sept thru May

Every church had at least one old fellow who had 20 or so bars;

Everybody aspired to getting their bar at the end of the year.

Church used to be the place to be,

Clergy were respected

Evangelistic sermons and altar calls were frequent because it was expected that unbelievers would come to church with their friends

But Now

In our society, to the typical American, the concept of Evangelism or Evangelicalism is just as scary, repugnant, off-putting as the term Jihad is. To my Muslim friends Jihad speaks of their internal struggle against worldliness and anything that would dis-



tract them from obedience. To our culture it more often is perceived as this.

Evangelism is a term cherished by those of us “inside” Christianity, but despised by those on

the outside. We may think proudly of “spreading the Gospel,”

But, the notion of evangelism has gotten a bad rap in the last few

decades, **CLICK**” to many it means “socially awkward situations where we pressure them to accept OUR beliefs. If that’s what they think, most people want no part of it.

At dinner last night a Evangelical Lutheran minister went to great pains explaining that they were not really Evangelicals whom he described with disparaging terms.

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Have mentioned The Nones before. Fastest growing faith perspective in US

Many had one form or another of bad experience or perspective – scandals, money grubbing, power/prestige hungry Apatheists – while having a concern for the spiritual aspect of life, they don’t care about organized religion and don’t see any reason to care

Disillusioned. Disappointed.- scandals, church in fighting

Our family were Nones before it became fashionable

Family went to church, Whispering campaign against Pastor that drove him to nervous break down. My parents said that what Christianity is like, we don’t need it, and they were done with church.



stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an unknown entity. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where growth can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to bring them into relationship.

Takes time Patience

But, what was your conversion process like?

Our neighbors, the stranger, might be a lot more willing to go to a neighbors house then to a strange place like a church. Especially if you have been a good neighbor and seem like a normal person. I remember the Homegroup study on Neighbors. When we did it we knew one couple of the 19 houses on our block on the block. Our house and yard used to be pretty trashy.

Our daughter was horrified when we told her what house we were buying. She had been to a sale there and it was dirty, smelly, and gross. The outside was unkempt and uncared for. It was the blight of the block and neighbors heaved a sigh of relief when the people moved out. Fortunately an older couple, late 80’s, had bought it and spent a lot of money cleaning and renovating the inside. They never did much to fix the yard up Unfortunately 8 months after moving in the man died and we purchased it.

Karen went to work on the gardens. When it snows, I use my snowblower up and down the block, a couple of times in the summer Karen bakes zucchini or banana bread and we take a basket around and knock on neighbors doors and introduce ourselves, we do hotdogs on Halloween- 56 hotdogs, over 200 people came by, Karen helps them with their gardens and I dig out roots.

Everybody on both sides have been invited to our house

eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Final judgement – serious setting

Division Heaven and Hell

Mark of regenerate and unregenerate

No theological questions

No questions about denominational affiliation

Living out Gospel principles

Our life, values, and practice demonstrate the reality of our verbal profession

Almost parallel only difference is in verse 45-46. Here the group that is neglected is not my 'my brothers' but 'the least of these'. Context demands that we understand 'the least of these' to be referring to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, etc. In other words to the outsider, the marginalized of our society, the stranger to our Christian community.

Practicing hospitality is a viable means of reaching out to the

Nones and other disenfranchised parts of society

Look again at our definition

Hospitality primarily means creating a safe space where the

Hurt or betrayed – abuse, wounds from insensitive or harsh treatment

Irrelevant- blind faith or scientific reason

Those of us who are involved in church are programmed to invite people to church. We find ways to bring up in conversation, how compelling the sermons are and how warm and friendly we are, and how good the food is on the 4th Sunday. Part of this is driven by the desire to grow the church numbers, but there's also the very right desire to want to share something that is exciting or meaningful to us.

But when we invite people to participate in worship as their first experience as part of our faith community, we have things all out of order.

Sure, some people will come through the doors because of an ad in the paper, the sign outside or hearing about us, and we don't want to turn them away, obviously. But for those who are strangers to what this whole church thing is about, worship services as a first step may be overwhelming, alien or even alienating.

Think about what it is like for a real stranger to Christianity to come into our service.

What are the rules?

When do I stand or sit?

Where can I sit?

What is this music?

Am I dressed properly?

Other cultures

Where do I leave my shoes?

Can men and women sit together?

But, the last time a Muslim visited a service here there wasn't that

problem. They didn't come in cold, they came in the context of a relationship that had many conversations about faith, that piqued their interest, and for which they were prepared through prior explanation.

Although traditionally we've generally looked at corporate worship as a point of entry into our faith communities, it actually should be a destination in the journey of discipleship. This is particularly the case regarding The Nones, many of whom have had negative experiences with organized religion, or who have not had any contact with a church in years, if ever.

For many, the idea of participating in worship is a major commitment. After all, they either don't know any of the songs and rituals, or they have a bunch of negative feelings from their past.

This is a difficult place to start.

What does this have to do with hospitality? Why be hospitable if people are going to be so difficult?

To reflect God's hospitality.

God's welcoming character is displayed throughout Scripture. In the Garden, God provided Adam and Eve with everything, including fellowship, food and a home. After they rebelled and broke the covenant with Him, He still provided clothing to cover them. In Exodus, God provided manna for the doubting, complaining, distrustful Israelites in their wanderings. Later, God led them to the promised land—a land flowing with milk and honey. Throughout the Old Testament, God welcomes, establishes, feeds, protects, nourishes and instructs unlovely, rebellious, unbelieving, disobedient people with gracious hospitality. Additionally, Jesus shows us a picture of gracious hospitality in

numerous ways. Throughout the Gospels, He eats with sinners, receives children, and teaches us to invite the lowly to parties and to welcome strangers.

Finally, God's hospitality is on full display in the book of Revelation. Heaven is divine hospitality! We who deserved misery have received mercy, and have the holy joy of dwelling with our God forever.

Practicing hospitality is a practical way of loving and serving Jesus

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Matthew 25:31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.':37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the