# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Hospitality”**

**Hebrews 13:1-3**

**November 20, 2022**

With Thanksgiving later this week, I chose the topic of hospitality for our biblical conversation this morning. If I were to ask you to identify which character trait we should be striving to build into our lives as Christians, hospitality probably would not be high on your list. You might have picked “love” or “joy” or “peace” or one of the other fruit of the Spirit. Or, you might have said, with our Mission Statement, we are to “Become like Christ.” Hospitality seems like one of the less important and perhaps even optional virtues. But that’s not how the Bible presents it. In both the Old and New Testaments, hospitality is seen as absolutely essential. Paul identifies it as one of the basic qualifications for a church leader, and Jesus includes “I was a stranger and you invited me in” in his Matthew 25 list of behaviors that are evidence of having come to know him as Lord and Savior.

It is important to note that we are not talking about entertaining. Entertaining is when you invite your friends over, expecting that at some time in the future they will do the same for you. That is a good practice between friends, but hospitality is reaching out to others, often people you don’t even know, without expecting anything in return. I invite you to turn with me to Hebrews 13:1-3

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters.Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.

As with every Christian attitude and behavior that the Bible encourages in our lives, hospitality is motivated by love. You and I respond to God’s love for us by loving him and loving others as he has loved us in his Son, Jesus Christ: freely, humbly and sacrificially. The specific encouragement to show hospitality here in Hebrews is meant to remind us of the story of Abraham in Genesis 18. Let me read it for you

The Lord appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground. “My lord,” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while. Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. And since you’ve honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey.” “All right,” they said. “Do as you have said.” So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, “Hurry! Get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread.” Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.

God comes in disguise because he doesn’t want Abraham to treat him a certain way just because Abraham knows that he is God. The human heart that is cultivating the godly characteristic of hospitality, as is Abraham’s, is generous toward a person for his or her own sake. Hospitality is offered regardless of the social or economic or spiritual status of the recipient. Let’s take a closer look at how hospitality unfolds in the story.

Abraham is sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. It’s “siesta,” the time of day when everyone takes a break because it’s just too hot to do much of anything. Then, he notices three men standing nearby. This may seem to us a minor detail in the story, but it is at this point that hospitality is either offered or withheld. Everything that follows, the provision of rest and water and a meal are all the practical outcome of having decided to offer hospitality.

The custom of the day dictated that a stranger not walk into the camp of another person without being invited. Instead, as did the three men, he would stand at the edge of the camp until noticed and either invited to come in or told to go away. Not only does Abraham invite them in, but he *runs* to meet them and to welcome them. He then *runs* back to his tent to enlist his wife, Sarah, in this act of hospitality, and then he *runs* out to the herd in order to choose a tender calf for the meal. Why all this running in the heat of the day? Why encourage Sarah to hurry with the bread and the servant to be quick about preparing the roasted meat? Because it is his desire to do his very best for these men by meeting their needs as soon as he is able.

The character of Abraham seen in this encounter reflects the character of God. Our God reaches out to those who are not a part of his family and invites them in. That includes you and me. Paul says in Romans that we were once estranged from God, but Christ died for us that we may be forgiven and included in God’s family. We are no longer strangers but children of God.

Relating the Hebrews passage and the Genesis story to our congregation, we are meant to understand that the burden of making sure newcomers to our church are welcomed into our fellowship is on us, not on them. It’s not their job to somehow find their way in. It’s our job to recognize them, to welcome them, and to do everything we can to help them feel at home. It’s easy to forget what it feels like to be a stranger in a new place. Not only are you trying to navigate your way through an unfamiliar building, but you are dealing with an unknown network of people and relationships. What a difference hospitality makes. If you think back, someone was probably hospitable to you when you first came to this church. Now, you can do it for someone else.

Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers and he ended up entertaining angels without realizing it. I don’t think the author of Hebrews is saying that we should necessarily expect the same thing to happen to us. Rather, he is pointing out that when we step out in faith and obey God by making an effort to show hospitality, we will be blessed in unexpected ways. Wherever and whenever we show hospitality, God’s love will be present, and when God’s love is present, wonderful things are bound to happen.