

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
25th January 2022

READINGS

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

Genesis 18: 1-8

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Romans 16:1-5

REFLECTION

Long before the church had pulpits and sanctuaries, it had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. The earliest churches were communities that met primarily in houses and shared hospitality as they shared worship.

The first generation of Christians were a tinderbox of contrasting cultures and backgrounds. At least fifteen different nationalities heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Jews stood next to Gentiles. Men worshipped with women. Slaves and masters alike sought out faith in Christ. Could people of such varied backgrounds and cultures get along with each other?

We wonder the same thing today. Can white live in peace with black? Can protestant find common ground with catholic? Can a Christian family carry on a civil friendship with the Muslim couple down the street? Can diverse and different people get along?

The early church did. And did so without the aid of sanctuaries, church buildings or clergy. They did so through the clearest of messages (the Cross) and the simplest of tools (the home). Not everyone could serve in a foreign land, or stand before the leaders of a town and speak the case for Christianity, or preach to a rowdy crowd in a market square. But everyone can be hospitable.

Hospitality has always been at the heart of being God's people. Abraham fed, not just angels, but the Lord of angels (Genesis 8); Rahab, the woman of ill repute, received and protected the spies. Thanks to her kindness, her kindred survived, and her name is remembered (Josh. 6:22-23); Martha and Mary opened their home for Jesus and he, in turn, opened the grave of Lazarus for them (Luke 10:38-42).

Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. In the church building one person speaks; around the table everyone has a voice. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there is time to talk.

So do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality.

Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It's no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: "You matter to me and to God." You may think you are saying, "Come over for a visit." But what your guest hears is, "I'm worth the effort."

We live in difficult times for the church when many questions are being asked and few answers found. What will our future be? Will the church stay open? How do we deal with falling numbers?

I am more and more convinced that the way the church will grow is through relationships. And I firmly believe that the key to the church's future lies in its members and their willingness to be good neighbours, offering kindness and openness. It is as good neighbours, that strangers become friends, and friends become the faithful. So let us not

neglect the call to hospitality, the call to be a good friend, the service of being good neighbours and the challenge to care for others. For this is how God's work is done, and how God's love is shared.

PRAYER

God with us,
Companion and friend;
God who comforts in our sadness
And rejoices in our joy;
God who is love incarnate,
Love embodied;
God who welcomes us in prayer and praise
As beloved children,
Teach us to share your welcome with all around us;
Guide us to good neighbours;
And by our actions and our words,
May we point ever to your love for all.
May our actions, our care, our comforts shared,
Bear witness to you,
That others might know your goodness
And find your peace.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

