

Lent

WEEK SIX: THE HOST WITH THE MOST

THURSDAY, MARCH 25 – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

Throughout the gospels Jesus expressed tremendous hospitality towards those around him. Henri Nouwen describes hospitality as “the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend.” We read through the gospels of Jesus’ bringing outcasts back into the community and making strangers and enemies into friends. As we continue our Lenten journey to Jerusalem this week, we will reflect on God’s great hospitality to us in Jesus Christ and how we can respond in hospitality to others.

READ

THURSDAY, MARCH 25

As we continue through our Lenten journey our scriptures highlight God's character of merciful love and justice, and God's command to love in the ways He loves. Before you read the following verses pray for the Holy Spirit to befriend you in your reading and teach you from these passages. And as you read these passages, notice the ways that our gracious God is teaching and leading you.

Mark up the passages below as you read them:

- UNDERLINE** any words that relate to God's character and hospitality
- BOX** any phrases or descriptions of our response to God's grace in Jesus Christ
- ★ After you've read the passages once, read them again slowly – maybe out loud – then **STAR** one word or phrase that really seems to capture your attention at the heart

LUKE 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

1 PETER 4:8-9

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

LEVITICUS 19:33-34

³³ "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. ³⁴ The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

These questions are meant to help you reflect on the texts and apply them to your life. As you read through the texts know that the Holy Spirit is working within you. The Bible is not just a collection of pages but a living book since the Holy Spirit is working in and through it. So as you reflect seek to discern what the Holy Spirit might be teaching you through these passages.

1. If you had been Zacchaeus when Jesus stopped and told him to come down, how would you have felt? Embarrassed? Excited? Overjoyed? Afraid? How does the scripture indicate that Zacchaeus responded?
2. Why did Jesus dine with Zacchaeus? Why does this bother others?
3. Jesus showed hospitality to a stranger (Zacchaeus). How has God through Jesus Christ showed hospitality towards you?
4. In 1 Peter how does loving deeply (verse 8) connect with showing hospitality (verse 9)?

5. Why does Jesus emphasize showing hospitality “without grumbling”? How could hospitality and grumbling be connected?

6. What value does our passage from Leviticus highlight?

PRAY

FRIDAY, MARCH 26

Christine Pohl, who wrote a great book on hospitality called "Making Room", wrote: "We offer hospitality within the context of knowing Jesus as both our greater host and our potential guest. The grace we experience in receiving Jesus' welcome energizes our hospitality, while it undermines our pride and self-righteousness. The possibility of welcoming Christ as our guest strengthens our kindness and fortitude in responding to strangers." Pohl eloquently reminds us that any effort at hospitality on our parts is energized when we focus on Christ's welcome to us. As we pray today, we are going to reflect on Christ's hospitality to us and then ask God how we can then be hospitable to others in Christ's name.

1. Begin by reflecting upon the ways God has shown hospitality to you in Jesus Christ. Consider writing these reflections down in a journal as you pray. Give thanks for the ways God in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit has shown you mercy and grace.
2. Confess the pride and self-righteousness that we have shown in our efforts at hospitality. Confess the ways we have not shown hospitality to the outsider, the one in need, and have missed Jesus Christ in his 'distressing disguise' (Matthew 25:34-46).
3. Ask God in Jesus Christ to be our guest in our homes, workplaces, friendships, in our church, and community. Reflect prayerfully on what welcoming Christ would mean for our attitudes and actions. Consider writing these down in a journal as you reflect.
4. Reflect prayerfully on who 'the strangers' are that God may be beckoning you to welcome in His name. Ask God to give you wisdom and courage in His grace to share grace with others.
5. Close by praising God in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit for His great hospitality and grace.

FOR FAMILIES: ASK JESUS TO BE YOUR GUEST

At a mealtime ask the family how they would act, and what they would do, if someone famous was coming to dinner? How would that dinner be different than a normal night? Then ask about how they would act, etc... if Jesus was coming to dinner. Talk about how Jesus is both our gracious host (he gives us grace and mercy, and makes us friends when we were strangers) but Jesus also is our guest, like in the story with Zacchaeus. He comes to be with us and to share life with us. Pray together and invite Jesus to be your guest at your meal and in your home.

REST

SATURDAY, MARCH 27

The great preacher and writer Charles Spurgeon wrote wise words about rest: "Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength... It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less." So often we believe the opposite: that we do more by doing more. But as Spurgeon reminds us "rest time is not waste time." May you enjoy your time of rest and receive Gods good grace in the midst of it.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

"The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing."

WORSHIP [GATHER]

SUNDAY, MARCH 28

If your group gathers on Sunday then use the "Gather" section (Wednesday) for your group time together.

Our theme in worship today is God's hospitality and our response. This is also Palm Sunday when we remember Jesus' ascent into Jerusalem – take a few notes for yourself during the service that will help in the next few days.

Where did Jesus really get my attention in the worship time today?

What stood out to me in the sermon?

What did the Holy Spirit call to mind during the reflection time after the sermon?

Who do I want to remember to pray for in this coming week?

"With palms everyone came on the occasion of your arrival, Savior, crying to you, "Hosanna!" Now all of us sing praises to you from our pitiful mouths, as we wave to you the branches of our souls and cry out : "O you, who are the highest, save the world that you brought into being, Lord. And blot out our sins, just as you previously dried the tears of Mary and Martha."

-Romanus Melodus, 4th Century

PRACTICE

MONDAY, MARCH 29

HOSPITALITY TO THE STRANGER

In our prayer section we were asked to prayerfully reflect on who the strangers and enemies in our midst are. If you did that earlier in the week, reflect on that list and if you haven't taken a few moments to write down the strangers and enemies around you. These could include people or groups who are different from you (different beliefs, different religions, different lifestyles), people you disagree with, people you are against or who are against you, or simply people you don't know. As you identify the strangers and enemy in your midst, think of one act of mercy you could show to someone on that list this week. If the person is someone you know it could be a kind word, or a change of attitude (see them as loved by God, and yourself as much of a sinner as they are), or a hospitable gesture. If it is someone or a group you don't know you could pray for them every day, or seek another way to provide help or kindness.

Hospitality at Home

Hospitality truly starts at home, with God loving us and welcoming us to our new home in God's kingdom as adopted children. So, a great way for us to practice hospitality this week is in our homes: to seek to lessen estrangement and show unconditional love. Parents: practice presence with your children this week as an act of hospitality, taking extra time out of busy schedules to listen, affirm, play, guide, correct, talk, share, and engage together. Ask yourself: what does mercy look like to my children, especially during the tough days? Spouses: you can practice hospitality by following through on the questions: "what is one thing that I could do or say today that would show my spouse that I value them? What is one way that I could lessen estrangement and bring reconciliation this week?" Children: Whether as growing or grown children we can show hospitality to our parents by thinking of one way we could show mercy and grace to our parents this week. Families: as a family speak together this week of one way you together want to show hospitality. There are many ways that families could show hospitality from welcoming a new neighbor, serving together in a ministry, to adoption or fostering, sheltering a family or individual in need in your home, taking in an international student, or many other ways.

Hospitality in the Workplace

Hospitality in the workplace could be expressed in many ways: listening well and receptively to other's ideas, concerns, and critiques, being open to conversations and relationships, being kind to others, showing that you value your co-workers' thoughts and ideas, honoring appropriate boundaries, being courteous in your language, resisting gossip and slander, not excluding others, praying for others, encouraging others. Think of one area you could inhabit hospitality at work and seek to prayerfully put that into practice this week.

Hospitality in the Neighborhood

Think about one or two ways that your family could be hospitable to a neighbor or make your neighborhood a welcoming place. This could mean many things: from welcoming new people to the neighborhood, seeking to be a good neighbor in the ways you care for your home and

treat others, to participating in local schools, community centers, parks, local government, and other social services, seek to help the most vulnerable in the neighborhood, and making the neighborhood a hospitable and safe place for all. Hospitality in the neighborhood could mean everything from a kind word, caring for the environment and the most vulnerable, sharing a meal with someone experiencing homelessness, to fighting against racism and inequality. Prayerfully ponder one or two ways you could be a good neighbor this week and seek to practically follow through.

Hospitality in Church

Prayerfully ponder about one way you or your family could contribute to Westside being a more hospitable church. Especially in the midst of this pandemic, it is hard to show hospitality to those who are still 'strangers' to our church. List one or two ways you could welcome someone into the life of the church or make someone feel welcomed in the church. Practically think about how to follow through this week.

Hospitality to those in Need

Michael Card describes that Jesus often comes to us in his 'distressing disguise' as the poor, those in need, those suffering. These are often the strangers among us that we don't see or turn our eyes away from. This week, seek to show hospitality to those in need by contributing to or volunteering as a family or Connect Group with a food bank, a homeless shelter, or another group that is seeking to show hospitality to those in need.

REFLECT

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

Today is for reflection in Jesus' presence – a chance to recall the past week and regather for the next week of the journey. You can use these questions for Connect Groups or for personal study.

READ again: Luke 19:1-10

1. What strikes you as you read this story again? Any thoughts or questions?
2. What does this passage reveal about the character of Jesus?
3. In our passage we read that Zacchaeus responded to Jesus by climbing a tree to see him, welcoming Jesus into his home, and responding to Jesus in action. In what ways is the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond to Jesus this week?
4. Where has Jesus met you with grace in your journey this past week?
5. What ongoing prayers do you carry into the next week of Lent?

O You who alone know what lies before us this day, grant that in every hour of it we may stay close to You. Let us be in the world, yet not of it. Let us use this world without abusing it. If we buy, let us be as though we possessed not. If we have nothing, let me be as though possessing all things. Let us today embark on no undertaking that is not in line with Your will for our lives, nor shrink from any sacrifice which Your will may demand. Suggest, direct, and control every movement of our minds; for my Lord Christ's sake. Amen."

— John Baillie, *A Dairy of Private Prayer*

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."

— Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*

GATHER [RECONNECT]

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

If your group met on Sunday take the opportunity on Wednesday to check in with your prayer partner(s) midweek, supporting each other in this journey.

Reconnecting

Who is a person early in your life that affirmed you like Jesus did with Zacchaeus? Who is a person that builds you up now?

How did your Lenten practices or prayers go this past week? Did anyone choose a special practice for Lent?

Each week we will come back to the question of what it means to live as people of faith in Jesus. This week, how would you answer that question? Make a note so you can follow your progression of thought and practice over this Lenten journey.

Read Luke 19:1-10

What struck you in your own reading and prayer this past week on this passage? What struck you from Laurie's sermon on Sunday?

Why do you think Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus's house? Why was it important that Zacchaeus responded with welcome? How is Jesus inviting himself into your life and home and how are you challenged to welcome Christ?

What is a way that this connect group could be hospitable to each other, to the church, and to Seattle?

What questions or convictions surface from this story as we continue through this Lent journey?

Faith and Practice

Faith is the willingness to submit ourselves to God's call and God's purpose for us. What is one place in your life that we can pray for courage and action this week?

Close out your time as a group in prayer for one another.