

The Hospitality of God

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Preacher: Alasdair I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] All right, let's read scripture together. We're going to read a passage from the Old Testament and then one from the New Testament. These are texts that will be the base for Alistair's sermon, not sermon, sermon tonight.

Yeah, not more than one, just one. Isaiah 55 verses 1 to 13. And then after we read that, we will read from John chapter 2.

We have Bibles down here on the tables. Very free at any time to get up and grab one if you'd like one, a hard copy. And the first reading is on page 615.

This is the Word of the Lord. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come by and eat.

Come by wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Bring diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food.

[1 : 0 3] Incline your ear and come to me. Hear that your soul may live and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know and a nation that did not know you shall run to you. Because of the Lord your God and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. And my thoughts, then your thoughts, for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

[2 : 1 3] It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

And let's read together also from John's Gospel in the New Testament, chapter 2, verses 1 to 11.

On the third day, there was a wedding at Cana Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine.

And Jesus said to her, woman, what does this have to do with me? Not hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Now there was six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

[3 : 2 6] And Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water and they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it.

And when the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine and did not know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, everyone serves the good wine first.

And when the people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now. This is the first of his signs Jesus did at Canaan Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

This is God's holy word. Well, my thanks to Cody for leading the first part of the service. It's hard for me now to stand for a whole hour.

So this is the last time I will ever travel to preach outside our congregation-esque valley.

[4 : 27] And I'm here because I go way back. My first connection with St. Columbus was us as a family sitting in the gallery there in the 1970s when I was a student at the Free Church College as it was.

And the minister here was Donald Lamont, Derrick's father. More recent years we were members here under Derrick.

We actually lived in the same street as the Lamonts. The man's was in Forbes Road then. And I was going to tell stories about Donald Lamont and the young Derrick Lamont.

But I've been told I have till half past to preach. And if I start telling stories as some of you know, then there won't be any of God's word.

And my job tonight is to preach St. Columbus vacant. It sounds like you've got the kind of preaching at an empty church. Doesn't it?

[5 : 31] Preach St. Columbus vacant. And remember to switch off the lights when everybody's gone. Well here you are on the cusp of a new era.

And it's hard to know what to preach tonight to you, St. Columbus. Except that the person who asked me to preach tonight was Derrick Lamont. And he, as so often before with himself Katrina, had just shown me hospitality.

And I thought immediately of the hospitality word, but to think perhaps of the deeper hospitality behind Derrick and Katrina and others ourselves, the hospitality of God in the gospel.

And I'm saying to you all tonight, that's a hospitality that you're called to enjoy. And it's a hospitality you're called to share.

Now I think the hospitality of God is a huge theme in the Bible in all kinds of ways. And we're going to walk through the gospel of John tonight, which is why I didn't announce a text.

[6 : 45] But if you want, we're going to begin in John chapter 2. But I want to try and look at a few stories very quickly. And as we dip into these stories, you'll see Jesus using very simple images for hospitality.

He doesn't use foodie language to put it that way. He doesn't illustrate it from what people have heard about Herodian banquets, of their 25 courses.

Jesus uses simple images to speak about hospitality because obviously he's speaking to the poor, to ordinary people, but also crucially this, because he's speaking of himself as a necessity, not a luxury.

So he says things like, I am the bread of life. He doesn't say I am the whatever. The 1,000-pound white truffle shaved on top of course number 10 of the banquet.

He's a necessity, not a luxury. And this hospitality that we'll run quickly through a few stories tonight, this hospitality, I want to say at the very beginning, is offered to you.

[8 : 07] You are invited to pull up a chair and sit at Jesus' table. I'll say some of the, I've been told off for saying in the past, but if this is the last time I travel to preach anywhere, who cares?

I believe that you can say when the gospel is preached that Jesus behind the gospel is saying to people, my name is Jesus.

And I am your waiter for the evening. The hospitality of God in the gospel available only through Jesus and available to anyone.

Now, I'm going to try and hit six stories in 25, 24 minutes. So we'll see.

First of all, the wedding at Cana that we just had read, John chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. I'm going to call this one the generous hospitality of God.

[9 : 15] This one's about wine. Now, weddings are always occasions for hospitality. And they were then, the hospitality was very humble.

It was ordinary food. But there was lots of it. There was plenty to eat and to drink. And in that culture, the groom was responsible for the food and the wine.

The wine runs out early, a social disaster. They would, his family, the groom's family would never live it down.

Jesus is a guest. His mother speaks to him about the problem. And Jesus, as you know, miraculously turns the water into wine.

Now, what's happening there? Jesus steps in and fulfills the role of the host in hospitality.

[10:14] The bridegroom host no less. And he provides wine for the guests. If you have your Bible in verses 9 and 10, you'll see that the master of the feast complements the groom on his provision of such amazing wine.

But of course, the groom had nothing to do with it. It was Jesus who provided it all. And so from that, I want to highlight the generosity of Jesus from the text.

In verse 6, they say that each jar, the Bible says two to three measures. And these measures, people say 35, 40 liters.

So the NIV offers the more generous one. And it says that each jar held from 80 to 120 liters.

And I think the reference to the amount and the six jars is saying that all the water was turned into wine. So let's just say 80 to 120, take 100, six times 100, even I can do that, 600 liters.

[11:31] I mean, it's ridiculous. Jesus provided far more than was needed for the emergency, just to get over the crisis.

And Jesus is saying through this provision that he has come to be extravagant. Notice verse 6 also says that the jars were the kind used for Jewish washings.

So that's a symbol of the old way, the over and over and over again rituals of cleansing. This has come to do a new thing, and Jesus has come to do a once and for all thing.

So this is the generosity of God through Jesus in the gospel portrayed, dramatized for those who have eyes to see and the faith to understand.

And I leave it to Corey to illustrate for you what the generosity of God means. The generosity of God in Jesus for us and to us, because I don't have time to do it.

[12:44] But you think of anything that God does, His generosity in giving Jesus, His generosity in giving Jesus to the cross, His generosity in forgiving us every one of our sins, His generosity in giving us the Holy Spirit, His generosity in bringing us into His family, His generosity in giving us the new heavens and the new earth forever and forever and forever.

The generous hospitality of God is one of the great themes of the whole Bible. Secondly, chapter 4, I'm just making the same point six times.

Chapter 4, the story from verses 4 to 42, famous, Woman at the Well, the Samaritan woman. I want to call this one the life-giving hospitality of God, life-giving.

This one is about water, and water can be delicious. Do you remember, it was a year past summer, I think in July, we had the hottest day ever in many parts of this country, and records were broken.

I think the Scottish all-time record was broken somewhere in the borders, somebody will tell me afterwards where. I had to go into town that day on the bus.

[14:16] It was boiling. I wanted to think that I had to do in town, and one thing I did was go for a haircut. I mean, it was boiling in there.

They said, do you want anything to drink? I said, just water. They came with the coldest water I had ever drunk, really chilled, and the glass had been chilled.

I drank the whole thing and won. Honestly, it was one of the most delicious things I've ever had, because it was so hot, I was so thirsty, and this was just perfect for my needs.

Now, here are Jesus and his disciples going through Samaria, I guess many of you know the story, place the Jews usually bypassed. And at noon, Jesus is on his own by a well, and he's thirsty.

The disciples have gone into town to do shopping, and a woman comes to draw water, he asks her for a drink. She's surprised, and they talk.

[15:23] And Jesus, I want you to notice now, again plays the host in a sense, as he offers her water, verse 10, and he says, the water that he gives is given by God, and it's given by Jesus.

It's the gift of God, but it comes through Jesus given by him. Now, of course, the woman is puzzled at what he's saying, because he can't, he doesn't have anything to take water up from the well.

But of course, Jesus is offering to deal with a deeper thirst in the hospitality of the offer of water.

And the woman believes, and she witnesses, and the Samaritans later on the story, we find them from verse 39, actually giving hospitality to Jesus.

And that's another whole theme in the Gospel and in the Bible, how we are called to give out hospitality to Jesus, the different kinds of hospitality that Jesus experiences in the Gospels.

But anyway, I think Jesus here through the water is offering life, offering life. His claim is that he is as essential for spiritual life as water is for physical life.

[16:48] In verse 14, he offers it as a bubbling inner spring, welling up to eternal life. Great verse in the Old Testament that I often heard growing up, Jeremiah 2.13, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

And we all do it. We all trust in things that can't hold what we want to get out of them, that will never, never, ever ultimately satisfy us.

People all around us are dying of thirst. And in a sense, what they do is they drink salt water.

It looks like water, but it just makes them more thirsty. And they try to drink more of whatever it is to satisfy their thirst. And all that does is dehydrate, and eventually drinking salt water, it yields to complete dehydration and death.

That's what's happening spiritually in our city as people try to slake their thirst with water that will never satisfy.

[18:16] Silver chair, the lion to Jill. Jill's afraid because of the lion by the stream. And she says, I'll have to go and find another stream.

And the lion says, there is no other stream. We know that water is precious.

Read on the news all the time, people desperate, difficult situations, desperate above all for water.

And if water is precious, then the water that Jesus offers is priceless.

And he of course had to go to the ultimate cost for us to drink this water on the cross. Later on in John's Gospel, Jesus says on the cross, I thirst.

He had to suffer that spiritual hellish thirst for us so that we might not go to a place of eternal thirst, but so that we might receive water from Him through the hospitality of the cross.

[19:27] The Jesus who hear in this story was lonely at noon and thirsty. And the cross in the ultimate sense was lonely in the darkness at noon and thirsted for your salvation.

Water, the life-giving hospitality of God. Thirdly in chapter 6, verses 1 to 59, I'll call this the satisfying hospitality of God.

This is about bread, and every culture knows a staple kind of bread. Jesus feeds 5,000 plus in his hospitality with the boys, five little rolls and two small fish.

That night he walks on water in a storm. Next day the crowd come looking for him on the other side of the lake and his talk to them focuses on bread, and he says, my bread is better than any other, better even than the manna in the wilderness.

That's another illustration of divine hospitality, the manna in the wilderness. And Jesus says, mine is better. Why is it better? Because his bread is bread for the soul, bread for the heart, the kind of bread that can satisfy your deepest spiritual needs and your deepest heartache forever.

[20:58] Jesus doesn't simply give this bread. He says twice in this chapter, 35 and 48, I am the bread of life.

And at its simplest level here, all the eating language that we hear, come and eat this bread. Jesus says, I'm the bread, come and eat. This eating language at the simplest level is dramatic language for really engaging with Jesus.

We use that language all the time. You go and visit a family and there's a girl there, eight or nine years old sitting in the corner reading a book, and they say she reads all the time.

She just eats books. She doesn't eat books. But she does eat books in that sense. Or you may say if somebody, art galleries are her meat and drink.

She just loves to soak in that atmosphere. So Jesus is inviting us to come to him personally and eat this bread, the bread that is Jesus, to satisfy our spiritual hunger.

[22:11] He's saying to us, let me satisfy your spiritual hunger. We read in Isaiah 55, why do you spend your money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?

It's a question you can ask the whole of this city. Why are you wasting your time and money on things that will never ultimately feed your soul and satisfy you?

And Jesus is saying, if you taste this bread, you'll never look for another. If you trust in me, you will never look for any other savior because you will be satisfied with the satisfying hospitality of Jesus.

Great Scottish theologian of a long time ago, William Guthrie once said, less cannot satisfy and more is not desired. Jesus is just perfect to satisfy any heart, any soul that lets him deal with their spiritual hunger.

And if there was time, we could talk about feeding on Christ in the scriptures, feeding on Christ in the Lord's Supper, but there sure isn't time.

[23 : 36] Number four, the foot washing in chapter 13, which may sound like a strange one to you. Jesus washes the disciples feet. I'll call this the humble hospitality of God.

He washes their feet there in chapter five. And that in that culture was an act of hospitality. It was a kind hosts provision for guests, dusty roads, hot climate.

That's what you did. Something has just flashed into my mind. Please forgive me, Cody, if this isn't true. But I remember being involved in meetings discussing preaching here, Derrick and you and one or two others discussing preaching programs for St. Columbus a few years ago.

And we're arranging the next meeting and I remember getting an email, can you make a particular date? And we were all replying to this email.

And Cody's reply was, it conflicts with my pedicure. You didn't say that. I'm sure he said that.

[24 : 56] We knew it wasn't true, but he was being funny. He's funnier than he thinks. Anyway, Jesus washes the disciples feet.

I had a whole pile of these stories to introduce and my wife and daughter there censored them all. I hadn't thought of that one. No disciple thought of washing feet.

Unlike Mary in the previous chapter puts perfume on Jesus feet. So here's Jesus, the host acting as a lowly servant and offering this gesture of hospitality to his disciples.

And it's a brief dramatization of his mission. Verse three, knowing he had come from God and was going back to God, he dramatizes the whole story. If you read this story with Philippians 2, 5-11, which talks about Jesus coming from glory to earth to the cross and back to glory.

Well, that's what Jesus is doing here. He's telling the story in drama. He gets up from a central place at the table, takes off his outer garment, so dressed like a slave, wraps a towel around his waist, another sign of a servant, pours water into a basin and washes feet.

[26 : 15] That's what he will do, cleansing through the cross. Then he puts his garment back on and resumes his place. It's a picture of his self-humbling, the self-humbling of the whole story and this particular self-humbling in this act of hospitality.

And he also gives as a model here, verses 14 to 15, that having seen the humble hospitality of Jesus, we might humbly offer hospitality to others.

I saw this illustrated in something I was reading happening. It happened literally. A woman in Vancouver, Toshiko, a Japanese background, washing feet at a drop-in center for prostitutes in the poorest part of that city.

These women's feet were often very dirty, covered in sores, needle marks, and this woman, Toshiko, she sang a Japanese lullaby to them.

She had a little English and listened to their stories and had enough English to speak to them of God's love. And when asked why she did this day after day when she didn't have to, she spoke of the humility of Jesus.

[27 : 38] And she said, I want to be like Jesus. And then she added, and also because men treat them like garbage, like garbage.

And she wanted to treat these poor women as Jesus would have done, the humble hospitality of God.

Chapter five, go to the last chapter, but this is the penultimate one. The Breakfast on the Shore, chapter 21, verses 1 to 19.

I'll call this the restoring, restorative hospitality of God. There in Galilee, barbecue on the beach, if you look at verses 9 to 13, Jesus is the host and he's the cook.

He does the barbecue and he's got food ready for the disciples. So he's the host, very clearly. Peter suggests that the night's fishing, they catch nothing, daybreak, Jesus is on the shore, he's not recognized, he tells them what to do, they obey, huge haul of fish.

[28 : 54] And told that it's Jesus on the shore, Peter swims ashore, and Jesus has fish cooking and bread there ready. And he says to them, bring some of the fish, come and have breakfast.

And after Jesus provides breakfast, Jesus and Peter talk, and the way I see the picture, they're talking first of all the fire, and then walking along the shore in verse 20a.

Peter turned and saw the disciple and Jesus loved following them. So they start talking at the fire and then move along the shore. Now the charcoal fire, it said to be in verse 9, the word is used elsewhere only in 18 and 18 in John, where the fire where Peter denied the Lord.

A charcoal fire had a very distinctive scent, fragrance. So Peter at this charcoal fire would have remembered denying Jesus at another charcoal fire.

And the memories would have come flooding back. He denied Jesus at the first fire three times.

And at this fire, Jesus asks the question three times, do you love me?

[30 : 15] Do you love me? Do you love me? That's the key thing. Each time, he also gives Peter a commission to go with the gospel to the world.

And I think of this as the hospitality of grace, the restoring hospitality of Jesus. And notice, I think the symbolism is interesting.

This grace walks Peter away from the fire. I think they start talking at the fire, they bring it all flooding back, and Jesus walks Peter away from the fire and asks him his questions and is assuring him of his forgiveness and his restoration to usefulness.

The restoring hospitality of God that when you as a Christian fail Jesus, you receive the hospitality of grace, perhaps much to your surprise, and you're forgiven yet again, and you're commissioned yet again.

The sixth one is the Father's house. I don't have time to do this one. Chapter 14, verses one to six, I'll call this the homecoming hospitality of God.

[31 : 39] It's where Jesus says, in my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you. Jesus gets the house ready.

He prepares the way, of course, through his death and resurrection, ascension and so on. But going back to the Father's house is so amazing for Jesus, and he's saying, I want you there too to see me in that beatific vision.

And I'll take you to myself, he says in verse three. He's central, and when we leave this world we go to a place where we'll be at home to be with Jesus.

We'd expected and everything is ready. In fact, Jesus is saying to, in his hospitality about the Father's house to every Christian, as they think about one day leaving this world, Jesus is saying to you, don't worry about a thing.

I'll take care of everything. In conclusion, it's a great line in one of the Psalms.

[32 : 49] Psalm 34 in verse eight, come, taste and see. And that's our prayer for St. Columbus, that many will come, taste and see the hospitality of God as the Holy Spirit opens their taste buds to the gospel, and only he can do that.

Also pray that week by week, under the ministry here of Corian dollars, that every Christian might find the gospel incredibly moreish.

You know what it is when certain foods are moreish to you. Pray that the ministry of the word here might make the gospel and Jesus himself more and more moreish to you as the months and the years go by.

And I need to finish, one day there will be a new earth. Back to Isaiah in 25, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.

He will swallow up death forever. He will wipe away tears from all faces. Until then, you and I have the gospel table of divine hospitality laid by Jesus.

[34 : 23] And I say with all the authority of Jesus Christ, whoever you are, everything you need is on the table.

Amen.