

Untamed Hospitality
Colossians 3:12-17 and Romans 12:13
September 1, 2019

On Sunday mornings during the month of September, I am going to do something I have never done before: preach on the same scripture passage for 4 weeks. It is the one Jim Nelson just read (Colossians 3:12-17). Here's why: turn with me to the sermon note page of your bulletin.

I am going to lead you through a study of our new mission statement that we have adopted over these past several years. I can't think of a better way to prepare us for the arrival of our new pastor, Rev Dr. Craig Lindsey, than by studying and knowing our mission as a church.

First of all, what is a mission statement? A mission statement tells why we exist as a church. It expresses our goal as a church. This helps us because when we make a decision, we look at the mission statement ask, "Does this decision fit into our purpose as a church? Is what we have decided express who we are?" A mission statement guides us as we follow Jesus Christ.

Here it is:

VPC's Mission Statement: To make Christ known through reconciliation while communicating respect and love to all people.

The principles to accomplish this are:

- Worship that glorifies God
- Growing in our faith in love, hope and the peace of Christ
- Caring for the children of God
- Reaching out to the community and the world
- Seeking an attitude of servant-hood

As we look at these this coming month, I am not going in order. We are not going to cover all the principles. And sometimes I will combine several principles at once, which is what I will do today. We will get to that in a minute.

As I mentioned, I will use the same scripture passage each Sunday – Colossians 3:12-17. The reason is this passage demonstrates our mission statement and all the principles to accomplish it.

For example, verse 13 “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” This describes reconciliation, a key word in our mission statement.

Verse 12: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” This describes the second part of our mission statement “Communicating respect and love to all people.”

Verse 16 “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs.” This is another way to describe worship (the first principle) and growing our faith (the second principle).

Then along with the Colossians passage (which you will hear over 4 Sundays), I will include another passage to highlight the message for the day. Look at the scripture passage just above our mission statement. It is from Romans 12:13 “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” This is our theme for today.

Hospitality is a big part of our mission statement. It certainly includes communicating respect and love to all people. It falls into the last 3 principles: Caring for the children of God, reaching out to the community, seeking an attitude of servant-hood.

Practice hospitality.

There is the story of the pastor who felt that their church was a bit stuffy and could use a bit of friendliness. So, one Sunday he announced that the following Sunday they were going to start a custom of shaking hands and greeting each other. At the close of the service a man turned around to the lady behind him and said "Good morning," and she looked at him with shock at his boldness and said, "I beg your pardon! That friendliness business doesn't start until next Sunday."

Practice hospitality. Why?

Because God is a God of hospitality. You see it at the beginning – the creation of the world, and God placed us here as an act of hospitality. God rescues the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and as an act of hospitality gives them a place to live.

The duty of hospitality comes from the center of who God is. God said to the people of the OT: I am the Lord your God who made a home for you and brought you there with all my might and all my soul. Therefore, you shall love the stranger as yourself.

God continues: "When a stranger lives with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native-born, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19:33-34

Hospitality is the very nature of God. God says you extend hospitality to others because I am the Lord your God.

It was the strangers, orphans, widows, and the poor that were on God's priority list of people to receive hospitality in the Old Testament. God said, "[I] defend the cause of the fatherless and widow, and love the stranger, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are strangers, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt" (Deut. 10:18-19).

The New Testament continues the theme. God showed hospitality through Jesus. The Apostle Paul says the good news of Jesus Christ is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). In other words, God offered us hospitality even as we walked away from God. This is the ultimate act of hospitality given to us.

Therefore since we are the recipients of the untamed hospitality of Jesus Christ, we are called to extend that same kind of hospitality to others. Hospitality is a part of who we are as people of God. It is the nature of God and therefore, we practice it.

When people walk in our doors, they are looking for a place to belong. When I ask people in the new member class why they decided to become a member here, one of the reasons I hear the most is “because it felt like home.”

I love this definition of hospitality:

“An active desire to invite, welcome, receive and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.”

Keep in mind that the word hospitality contains “hospital,” a place where we go for healing and wholeness. Hospitality is about allowing your presence to bring healing to others.

Practice hospitality.

How can we show acts of hospitality?

Here at church it starts by greeting at the door, or even outside. Hospitality isn't just about smiling at visitors who walk into the doors of our church. It's about an active desire to welcome and care for new people. Let people read the hospitality of God in your smile.

Practice hospitality by saying hello.

We extend hospitality during the Passing of the Peace as you turn to someone near you, hopefully someone you do not know, the stranger, and look that person in the eye and you say, "The peace of Christ be with you." You are extending to them the richness of life in Christ.

Practice hospitality by extending the peace of Christ to someone.

That red Fellowship Pad...it is there for you to sign and then pass to the person seated next to you. If you are the last person in the row that receives it, look at it, and send it back down the row. As it comes back to you, look at the names there. Look for someone you do not know, someone who is a visitor. Greet them after the service; perhaps invite them to join you in the Fellowship Hall for some coffee and fruit and cookies.

Practice hospitality because it is in the very nature of God.

Invite someone you do not know or who is a visitor out to eat after worship on Sundays or after the Taize service on Wednesday.

Practice hospitality because it is part of who we are as the people of God.

And of course, we do not extend hospitality just in church. It can happen in our every day life. Buy a cup of coffee for the next person in the Starbuck's line. Let someone go in front of you in the check-out lane. It's noticing the cashier at the grocery store, or your waiter/waitress at the restaurant and calling them by name.

Practice hospitality by communicating respect and love to all people.

Everywhere we go, we carry God's message of hospitality that they are loved, known, welcomed and enough. See people as souls whose lives matter and God loves. Ask God to open your eyes and help you see people as God sees them, and to treat them as God treats us.

So this is my prayer: that the reality of God's hospitality for us will fill our hearts this morning. And filled with that joy, we go from this place determined to spread Christian hospitality to everyone we meet. For someday Christ, as an act of hospitality, will welcome us with open arms into our eternal home. Amen.