

Hospitality

June 8, 2008
Edwards (Knox) United Church
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Genesis 12:1-9

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Matthew 9:9-13 and 9:18-26 (Note: the links below will open the entire passage Matthew 9:9-26)

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Our texts are about the nature of call; what it means to respond to the aim of God. The calling says something about the nature of God and when we respond, it has an impact on how we relate to one another and how that relating transforms.

The Genesis story is another identity formation story that is told in the creation of an identity as a people. Abram is called and given land. A responsibility comes with that calling. Abram is to bless those around him. He is called to live in peace with his neighbors. In a world of migration, this changes the nature of encounter - it is not one of conquest but of living in harmony. Now that call was not always lived. However, it is there in the memory of the people. That memory was and is used to call them back to a value of blessing when they forget. It has the possibility of, when lived, creating an attitude of hospitality and inclusion. This will change how we live with those different from us.

The texts we read in Matthew also create an attitude of inclusion and radical hospitality. Jesus calls those who were on the outside of what was considered to proper and honorable. It is a world with fixed boundaries. You belonged to kin group, a tribe, a religious identity, a class; and you did not move out of it nor did you work with those different. You could not be a friend with those different, and here is Jesus expanding the boundaries, calling those who were outside the boundaries of what was considered to be honorable. Calling them friends.

Again the calling into the way of hospitality issues in transformation. The healing stories are about the attitude of those who catch the vision of hospitality. The atmosphere of hospitality creates a freedom to risk. Both the father and the woman risk because they trust the aim of God they have experienced. They have faith that the aim of God is moving towards healing and respond in faith. It is a trust in God that creates an attitude of hope.

The other night we watched a movie called *Lars and the Real Girl*. I recommend you rent it; it is on Bell Express and DVD. When you watch it, have these texts in mind, for it illustrates the power of hospitality.

The story is simple. A young man has isolated himself - he goes to work, church, and lives near his bother and sister-in-law - yet he remains in loneliness and does not connect at any intimate level. The story shifts when he gets a girl friend. He introduces her to his family, and they are in shock because she is a blow up doll. She is strange, is outside the experience of the community. He says she is a South American - a foreigner. He wants to take her to church and there is some resistance on the part of the community. And they overcome the resistance by remembering who they are.

Through the actions of those who love him, the girl friend is accepted - the church opens its doors. She becomes a member of the community in her own right. Gradually Lars, through the acceptance of the

community of this stranger, comes out of his shell. Like the woman in Matthew he reaches out. He trusts the love of his family and the community. This love is shown by how the girlfriend is included in the church, family and friends. Their hospitality heals Lars.

The movie is a powerful illustration of beginning in blessing. Having been blessed - having been called to hospitality - the community reaches out and the reaching out strengthens the community. Through images the movie makes its point, and the ending is one of celebration, hope and healing. As a viewer you are asked to let go of assumptions and let the narrative carry you, to feel the movement of the Spirit of love. It is a reaffirmation of the power of the call to love and how this love heals.

The point of healing is changing attitudes. The change in attitudes helps change reality. We ask what does healing mean in the context of societal issues? We find in the movie and the texts a clue to the healing of our world.

We move. We go into areas that others inhabit. In our history we moved into another people's land. It was attitude about context that collided. Rather than blessing those who were there, the European model was to believe there was nothing there to bless, that we brought enlightenment. The idea of blessing is to see what is there, and it is to be open to receive blessings. By blessing, one is blessed by the other. It creates a climate of hospitality - where we can hear the others' hospitality and are healed by the other. There is in the other a blessing that they can give to us. It is not a one way street.

The reality of the world is, we move and intrude. We are called upon to tell the truth about who we are and how we respond. The truth may be that we have attitudes of superiority; we are the ones who know the truth - that we own the truth. We acknowledge our attitudes - tell the truth about how those attitudes have hurt, and then we can move on to lament.

Lamentation is to face up to what is destructive in us. At the same time it is recognize what is blessed in us and how we have failed to live out of our best insights. Through the ideal of blessing we have created structures of inclusion and we lament when we have failed to follow the calling of blessing. That honest reflection can move us to be open to reconciliation.

Of course this is not a one way street. Those we seek to bless must also go through their own process of lament and truth telling. It is a move from victim to actor in the healing. As the woman in the text the other also reaches out in trust to claim their healing. That trust must be reinforced by our actions.

This is the calling of those who have the common good at their hearts. It begins in a trust that well being is possible. Our history does include hospitality of inclusion and now we seek to live out that calling. For those of us who believe in God, we begin in an attitude of trust. God is seeking continuously, in every moment, to offer blessing to all of creation. The nature of God is to seek well being of all living reality. All of life is blessed from God's perspective.

We are called to this way of seeing the world, and like the church in the movie, we can be those who open our hearts and minds to those who are different from us. This is why the United Church issued its apology in 1986 to our sisters and brothers in the First Nations. This is why we have pushed for an apology for the negative outcomes of the residential schools. This is why the United Church sent out this press release - Churches are invited to participate by offering prayers for the apology and the residential school survivors during worship this coming Sunday. We are asked to pray that the apology will be full, sincerely, and acceptable to the Aboriginal community. There will be an Assembly of First Nations reception the evening of Tuesday, June 10th from 5:30 - 9:30 pm at Westin Hotel in downtown Ottawa. There will be a sunrise ceremony at Victoria Island about 5:30 am on Wednesday, June 11th. There will be a sacred fire maintained for 24 hours in advance of the apology.

The Apology will be delivered by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons at 3:00 pm following Question Period.

We can participate in this time of blessing by our prayers. We are connected by the spirit of God - we begin a journey of healing and blessing. We are open to being blessed.

George Hermanson

www.georgehermanson.com