

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
TEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“RADICAL HOSPITALITY”

Hebrews 13:1-25

Romans 12:9-21

October 9, 2011

9:00 & 11:00 A.M. Services

Hospitality is love in action. It is expressed in random acts of kindness and doesn't have to be organized or programmed or formulated. When we welcome others and show them respect, we welcome Christ and honor him. Spanish-speaking peoples have an expression that illustrates this point: *Mi casa es tu casa*. Literally translated it means, “**My house is your house,**” but these words do not adequately convey the significance of this greeting. It is not only an expression of welcome; the words express the reality that for the time guests are entertained in the house, they are members of the family and are treated as such. This is true regardless of who the guests are, their backgrounds, or past histories. All that matters is that you are here under the roof of the Park Hill congregation. You are here and you are very special. Radical hospitality means that no one is left on the outside; all are welcomed as if they were Christ. Radical hospitality means that we do not look upon others as strangers or foreigners.

The Bible says very clearly to love one another, pray for one another, care for one another and bear one another's burdens. Radical hospitality does not end with the benediction, or at the doors of the church. Radical hospitality extends well into the community. It is expanded into the community when we feed the hungry, when we visit the sick and when we minister to the marginalized, the poor, the rejected and the homeless. Ours is a building of hospitality, a place where we help those in need. This is God's church, a place of genuine love where broken hearts are mended and tears are dried.

Hospitality invites us to break down the walls of prejudice. Because as Paul writes in Romans: “*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in*

*hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*” Hospitality not only invites us to break down the walls of prejudice, but it encourages us to treat all others as worthy of the radical presence of God. Hospitality is the virtue that allows us to break through the narrowness of our fears and open our lives to the rich influence of others. Radical hospitality is an attitude of the heart.

It is more than just the coffee and donuts that we serve in the Coffee Bar. It is more than just the fellowship time we share with one another during our worship hour. In I Peter 4:9 we read, ***“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”*** Radical hospitality rises from an attitude of gratitude about life. Gratitude has no boundaries; it is spontaneous, extravagant and good. Our practice of hospitality is always in response to God’s gracious offering of hospitality to us. When we are overwhelmed by the power of God’s grace in our lives, then we are set free to share with those who are around us.

If we cannot love the people we know, how can we think about loving strangers? In Deuteronomy 24:17-18, Moses instructs the children of Israel not to deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. He says, ***“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there.”***

The bible makes it clear that Jesus welcomed all people. That is radical hospitality. No one was ever rejected; all were given a chance. Jesus freely associated with those whom society shunned. Lepers were rejected by all, but not by Jesus. Mark tells us: “A leper came to him begging him and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean" (Mark 1:40-42).

Jesus took the time necessary to welcome the sick and infirmed. His message of love and peace was announced to a wide spectrum of people and it was delivered to create a unified society of mutual trust and love. In treating all with respect and rejecting none, Jesus demonstrated that unity and inclusivity were to be sought and division and exclusivity were to be avoided. He put it this way: ***“I ask ... that all may be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me”*** (John 17:20-21).

One day a businessman was rushing to a meeting. As he hurried along the sidewalk he passed a homeless man sitting on a bench with a pot of somewhat wilted flowers and a hat ready for donations. Feeling sorry for the man, he reached into his pocket and threw in about a dollar of change, but he took no flower. He continued down the sidewalk but was forced to stop at a traffic light. As he waited he thought, **“That man was selling flowers and I did not take my purchase. I must return and take a flower.”** Although he might be late for his meeting, the man turned about and found the homeless flower salesman. **“I apologize, my good man,”** said the businessman. **“Your flowers are fairly priced and you have a good business. Please excuse my earlier lack of concern for your livelihood.”** The businessman then chose a flower and hurried off to his meeting.

One month later the same businessman was eating lunch with some clients in one of the city's finest restaurants. Unexpectedly one of the waiters came to him and said, **“Sir, I am sure you do not remember me, but I will never forget you. One month ago you spoke to me as I sold flowers on the street. You restored my self-dignity and encouraged me to get my life in order. It is because of your faith in me that I have this job today.”**

Paul says in Romans 15:7: ***“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”***

Hospitality is love in action. We saw it back in 2009 when Congressman John Lewis met with and forgave Elwin Wilson. Wilson had lived his life as a hater, a violent bigot and an angry man. At the age of 72 and in failing health he wanted to apologize for all the evil he had done.

Elwin Wilson was formerly a Ku Klux Klan supporter, who burned crosses, hung a black doll in a noose at the end of his drive, threw cantaloupes at black men walking down Main Street, hurled a jack handle at a black kid in his father's service station and sneered and yelled at black people in restaurants using the N-word.

But he wanted to atone for brutally beating a black seminary student at a bus station in 1961 for attempting to use a restroom marked for whites only. That student, John Lewis, was involved in the Freedom Rides that were part of the civil rights actions of that time.

Wilson traveled to Congressman Lewis' Washington office to apologize personally for smashing his fist into Lewis' face at that Greyhound station. Although Wilson could not explain where his hate came from, it really didn't matter, because he learned a great lesson in radical hospitality. After all, John Lewis had learned to practice that great virtue. Radical hospitality rises from an attitude of gratitude about life. Gratitude has no boundaries; it is spontaneous, extravagant and good.

If you are prepared to experience the radical presence of God and to embrace this concept of radical hospitality I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.