**Show hospitality to one another**

Text 1 Peter 4:8-10

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Gen 18:1-8; Romans 12:9-13; Rev 19:7-9; 1 Peter 4:1-11

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 371, 503, 78b, 146, 356, 432, 295, 465

**Series:** The ‘one anothers’ of Scripture (#8)

**Theme:** The Apostle Peter exhorts the elect exiles of the dispersion to be carefully stewards in their Spirit-filled lives, loving one another by showing hospitality and using their varied gifts to serve one another.

**Proposition:** As exiles, living in a world which is not our permanent home, keep on loving one another earnestly by showing hospitality.

**Introduction**

When you travel away from home on holiday or business do you sometimes stay at a motel, hotel, B&B or a campsite? When you are celebrating a special occasion or just don’t want to cook and eat at home, do you sometimes go out to a restaurant or café? Accommodation and catering businesses have been hit particularly hard during this COVID pandemic because during lockdowns and other movement restrictions people have largely stayed at home.

In contrast to the hospitality industry, Christian hospitality is predominantly, but not exclusively, practiced in the home (e.g. Acts 2:46). Unlike the commercial provision of services to travellers, in Scripture, hospitality is not primarily about food or lodging, but about forming and strengthening interpersonal relationships. Hospitality has a long history throughout Scripture: Nomadic Abraham entertained angels (Heb 13:2) at his temporary tent home by the oaks of Mamre (Gen 18:1-8); Governor Nehemiah generously invited large numbers of officials and others to his table in the land of Judah (Neh 5); The widow of Zarephath fed the prophet Elijah, even though she had little; until the Lord provided much more (1 Kings 17:8-16); Jesus and His disciples relied on the hospitality of others as they travelled during their ministry (Matt 8:20; 10:14).

Is hospitality then mainly just a cultural Jewish, Ancient Near East practice? No. Not at all. Throughout classical Greek and Roman antiquity, guests had specific expectations of their hosts: a warm welcome, a comfortable place to sit, charming company and entertainment. Titus Livius (“Livy”) wrote in his “History of Rome”: *Travellers “enjoyed the hospitality of private citizens whom they treated with courtesy and consideration; and their own houses in Rome were open to those with whom they were accustomed to stay”.* There was even a ‘law of hospitality’ in the Roman Empire, the violation of which was considered a great crime.

To help us understand the Lord’s command to show hospitality to one another today, we’re going to look at 1 Peter 4:8-10: “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace*”. The three points this morning are:

1. Loving strangers
2. Grumbling
3. Showing hospitality
4. **Loving strangers**

Do you know any strangers very well? Well, that’s a silly question! Because once you’ve got to know someone, they are no longer a stranger! A stranger is a person ‘whom one does not know or with whom one is not familiar’. Parents wisely teach their young children “Don’t talk to strangers”. A stranger is a person who does not know, or is not known in, a particular place or community. When travelling we might explain to people we meet (especially if we are seeking directions) “I am a stranger in these parts”. All those who live by faith in God’s promises are described in Scripture as being ‘*strangers and exiles on the earth*’ (Heb 11:13).

Old Testament Israel were commanded by the Lord to love ‘*the stranger who sojourns with you as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*’ (Lev 19:34). Like barnacles at sea bonding themselves to a ship’s hull so those who were not Israelites would join themselves to God’s people as the prophet Isaiah revealed: “When the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, *then strangers will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob”*. (Isaiah 14:1, also 56:6-7; 60:3). Israel was to attract those who were strangers to the covenant Lord Is 60:3 "*Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising*” (Is 60:3 also 42:6; 49:6). In practice, the numbers were often small, due in part to the disobedience of God’s covenant people.

In his first letter, the Apostle Peter is writing to ‘elect exiles’ (1 Pet 1:1). Here the word translated ‘exiles’ means ‘temporary residents or refugees’. Brothers and sisters in Christ we are all ‘strangers’ on this earth; this place is not our permanent home. Like the Old Testament Israelites we are called to love other strangers - that is those we don’t know and those who are not known in our midst. Loving strangers is the core meaning of the Greek word (philoxenos) translated ‘hospitality’/’hospitable’ in the New Testament (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 5:10; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9/1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8). As you may already know, this word is made up of two parts: philo – friendly, familial, love of others (e.g. the word translated ‘brotherly love’ in 1 Pet 3:8 is Philadelphia) - and xenos means stranger, foreigner, non-resident guest. It is the root of the word “xenophobia” – fear of strangers. So philoxenos – hospitality - means ‘love of strangers, foreigners, visitors’.

Loving those who were once strangers is precisely what God graciously does. “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8). In Jesus His Son, God takes those who were strangers to the covenants of promise, who were far off, and brings them near by the blood of Christ (Eph 2.13) so that they are no longer strangers and aliens, but part of His household (Eph 2:19). Christ loves those who were once estranged from God. He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He provides rich, satisfying, spiritual food from His Word to those who hunger after righteousness (e.g. Matt 5:6). He gives living water ‘*welling up to eternal life*’ (John 4:14) to the thirsty. He provides clothing to cover the shame of our sin. Not inadequate loincloths made from fig leaves like those Adam and Eve fashioned but white robes, like snow, washed in the blood of the lamb, spotless, without stain of blemish. The garments of Christ’s righteousness

He comes to us our terminal sickness – death – and gives us life forever. He visits us in the impregnable fortress prison in which we were are bound by sin and sets us free. He welcomes us into His Father’s home where He has gone to prepare a place for each one of His people (John 14:2). Brothers and sisters, Christ has not neglected you, but He has loved you, who were once a stranger to Him. He calls you and me to ‘*love one another, just as I have loved you*’ (John 13:34). In His abiding Word, through the inspired writing of the Apostle Peter, Jesus calls us all today to: “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling”.* That last word ‘grumbling’ brings us to our second point:

1. **Grumbling**

A dictionary definition of the word ‘grumbling’ is ‘the action of complaining in a bad-tempered way’. Peter writes: “*Show hospitality to one another without grumbling*” (1 Pet 4:9). The Greek word translated ‘grumbling’ literally means ‘*a secret displeasure in the heart, and a sullen discontent that leads to criticism*’. This word describes murmuring, mumbling, complaining or whispering complaints, disappointments, and/or dissatisfactions.

People like you and I can get ‘grumbly’ when our expectations are not met. Perhaps someone is late for an appointment with you, and they have kept you waiting. Perhaps you expected to enjoy good health, but now you are unwell, you wanted to be married, or have children, or that better job and God hasn’t delivered on your desires as yet, so you are grumpy with Him. Children, perhaps you like beans but not brussels sprouts and your mum or dad serves you up those little cabbages packed with Omega-3 fatty acids, fibre and vitamin C and you are seriously disappointed! The people of Israel grumbled against the Lord in the wilderness because the divine food they had been given did not meet their expectations (Exo 16:7-8; Num 17:5, 10).

Peter doesn’t reveal to the elect exiles exactly how they are prone to grumble when showing hospitality to one another, but here are some complaints that people like you and me can have:

* I am just not gifted to show hospitality, so I let others in the church do this. They are much better at it than I would be if I tried.
* I don’t have time to get my house clean and cook a fancy meal.
* I don’t mind inviting my friends and family to my place, but I find having strangers in my home uncomfortable; especially those awkward silences when we run out of things to talk about!
* I can’t afford to provide people I don’t know with food and drink.
* I don’t mind being a guest at someone else’s place, but I don’t want to be a host. Sunday is my rest day and I work hard at my job the other days of the week.
* I used to invite people over to my place, but they never invite me and my family over to their home. I’m discouraged so I don’t show hospitality to others anymore like I once did.
* I don’t know how to talk to people I don’t know.
* I can’t cook or prepare food for others because my kitchen is too small!
* I don’t have enough food/money to entertain others.
* I wouldn’t invite **that** family they have too many children!
* I don’t like going to other people’s places – so others won’t want to come to mine!
* I’m too shy/embarrassed/proud do to hospitality.
* They’ll judge my cooking, my house and the behaviour of my children or my dog!

I could go on, but you get the idea. There are plenty of possible reasons to grumble about this command of the Lord and make excuses for not willingly obeying. How can we respond to all these excuses/complaints? From Scripture!

* Showing hospitality is not a special gift, it is the Lord’s revealed will for all his people. Being hospitable is one of the character requirements for a man to be an elder (1 Tim 3:32; Tit 1:8), but this is not exclusive to that office; any more than being above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, and gentle are. We are certainly all gifted in different ways, as Peter writes in verse 10: “*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace*”. So different people will show hospitality in different ways. Some meals may be more tasty than others, some conversation more varied than others, some homes tidier than others. That’s fine.
* Showing hospitality is not mainly about how tidy your home is or how elaborate the food or drink you serve, it is mainly about meeting the needs of others for fellowship, friendship and deeper relationship.
* Showing hospitality can mean simply a drink, maybe a snack and is certainly not an occasion to show off how much we may have.
* Like all the ‘one another’ commands in Scripture, showing hospitality is to be reciprocal. Each one of us is to be both a host and a guest on different occasions. There are no exceptions to this revealed in Scripture. If you or I are not doing this, then we are not being obedient to Christ.
* Hospitality does require a sacrifice of time, finances, convenience, familiarity and comfort. It is an act of Christlike service.

Author Rosaria Butterfield, former lesbian English professor, now a convert to Christ, and author of the book ‘The gospel comes with a house key – practicing radically ordinary hospitality in our post-Christian world’ has written: “*Hospitality puts our lives and hearts on display. We see our selfish ambition and our pride. When we see our own sin clearly, when we confess and repent of sin daily, then we are ready with a clean conscience to hold material things lightly and people dearly*”. Brothers and sisters, let’s put any grumbling aside and focus our attention on showing hospitality to others.

1. **Showing hospitality**

I mentioned the Dutch word ‘gezellig’ in our sermon a few weeks ago about accepting one another has Christ has accepted you (Romans 15:7). Gezellig is a rich term that includes the idea of being snug, cosy, sociable, companionable and relaxed. We all know that being in the company of like-minded people from the same background and with the same habits tends to be very comfortable. We feel at ease and ‘making’ conversation is generally straightforward.

When we show hospitality – loving strangers, that is people we do not know, or know well, then conversation can be more challenging. As hosts or guests we may start talking about topics that we don’t agree on. What should we do then? Or, as our relationship deepens, host or guest may start to open up about their personal life and we may find out about sin in their life. What should we do then?

The answer is in verse 8 of our text: *“keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins”.* Christlike (agape) love will pass over/overlook/forgive wrongs rather than enter into a dispute.cf. Prov 10:12; 1 Cor 13:7. Jam 5:20. Love also covers over a multitude of sins in that it does not gossip about sin, sharing another person’s faults with anyone who will listen. Instead love exercises discretion, restraint and builds close relationships by keeping matters confidential where appropriate. (Matthew 18:15–17 instructs us on the appropriate way to confront those who sin). Acting in love means we put others before ourselves. Love can cover a multitude of sins in that, when we act in true love, we are prone to overlook minor offenses, tolerate provocations, and forgive sin. We ‘bear with one another’ (Col 3:13).

As we work through this preaching series, can you see more and more how inter-connected the ‘one another’ commands of Scripture are? They are closely inter-related, as the Lord desires we all should be together as a single body of Christ, brother and sisters.

You might ask, **who** should I show hospitality to? Some people have been taught that this form of loving one another only applies to the situation of providing food and accommodation to visiting ministers and missionaries, but not to those within our own congregation. However, whilst these special circumstances are included, and would have been one practical application for the ‘elect exiles’ to whom Peter wrote, the hospitality commands in Scripture are much broader. As we’ve seen, they are interconnected to all the ‘one another commands’ in Scripture which are the Lord’s instructions for all His people. Hospitality is to be shown broadly, including to those we know well, but especially to those who are not so well known to us.

Hospitality is to be shown so that we can deepen relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ, both within our local church and also with those in other churches. Hospitality is not restricted to loving others in your own home, although this is the primary location revealed in Scripture. Hospitality can be shown to others by taking them out for coffee or a meal. However we tend to share more of ourselves when we are in our own familiar home surroundings. Our homes reveal things about our interests, our past, our family and our love for the Lord. This can be very helpful in stimulating deep conversations. Hospitality is shown by people in Scripture who have large houses (like Nehemiah) and those who have limited means (like the widow of Zarephath). Again, the size of your home is not the issue, but the size of your heart (1 Ki 4:29).

Hospitality is not primarily about what you gift materially, it is about giving yourself in love to others so that you can be more deeply connected to them. The importance of hospitality is strongly emphasised by Christ when He reveals that ministry to strangers is one of the sure evidences that a person knows Him (Matt 25:44), saying “*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me*”. When we show hospitality to another one of Christ’s adopted brothers or sisters, we show our love for our Lord Himself (John 14:15).

One of the joys of showing hospitality is that the Lord blesses us, as hosts, through our guests. The writer to the Hebrews reveals this truth, saying “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it*” (Hebrews 13:2). The reference here is to Abraham extending generous hospitality to three men who came to him with a message from the Lord (Gen 18:1-8). It applies to each of us when we willingly show hospitality to one another and receive blessings which we were not expecting including:

* Strangers become friends.
* Strangers share their love for Christ and encourage us.
* Strangers may challenge our prejudices, liberate us from our comfort zones, and teach us the wideness of God’s mercy.
* Strangers may broaden our perspectives so that we more and more marvel at the diversity of Christ’s church.
* Strangers may well be more of a blessing to us than we are to them when we warmly invite them into our home.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, having heard the Word of God today commanding you and me to ‘*show hospitality to one another without grumbling*’ are you committed to being a doer of this word? At this year’s AGM, I said in my pastors report: *There is an ongoing need to integrate regular visitors into the life of our congregation. This need is a call for us to continue to be kind and friendly towards those we do not know well and to be generous in our hospitality.*

We are already kind and friendly here in the church building, talking with strangers and engaging them in conversation. As we continue to grow, we need to ‘take this to the next level’ and regularly invite others into our homes, especially those who we do not know or do not know well. Remember that this is what Christ has done for us. He invites us to eat and drink with Him in the New Heavens and New Earth: “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb*” (Rev 19:9). Lord’s Supper reminds us that Christ has shown hospitality to us without grumbling. God’s Word calls each one of us to do the same, loving strangers because the Lord first loved us (1 John 4:19).

AMEN.