

CHAPTER 7: RADICAL HOSPITALITY

QUESTION: What is wrong with "tolerance"? How does it get confused with "acceptance" or "inclusion"?

QUESTION: What makes you feel welcomed in another person's home? What do you do to make others feel welcome in your home? How do we practice those things as a community?

TEXT: John 13:1-17—Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

QUESTION: The foot washing occurred on Jesus' final night with his disciples. It, along with the sharing of bread and wine, were the two visual illustrations he used to define what it means to be a disciples. And yet, we celebrate communion every week, but foot washing...not so much? Why do we avoid this powerful symbol? What does it say about us as followers of Jesus?

QUOTE: The Church begins to expand the table by providing the kind of hospitality that equally embraces everyone, not pulling some close and keeping others at a distance. This must happen in our faith communities from both a telescopic and a microscopic view. It must be explicitly expressed from the pulpit and in the language of our mission statements and promotional material. It needs to be printed and spoken and taught and repeated and modeled by ministers to those in the pews, and it has to be something imprinted on our individual hearts: our personal, relentless pursuit of the welcome of Jesus for everyone, even those we find most difficult to welcome. p.68

QUOTE: The Church tends to do a whole lot of speaking and a whole lot less listening these days. Things began changing for me as a pastor and as a person of faith when I began to see ministry more as sitting with people and listening to their stories, rather than standing at a distance and trying to dazzle them with brilliant words. That simple act of sharing space with people is a sacred offering, and in a world where most of us are content to shout our opinions at relative strangers from a safe space, the radical hospitality of Christ pulls people closer together and demands that we see and hear them. And once we view a person in the illuminating light of actual relationship, we cannot help but see the God in them; we feel the presence of the Divine; we welcome Jesus in our midst as we meet with them. p.69

QUOTE: There's a popular Progressive Christian myth that says if Jesus were here today, he would be hanging out solely with the poor and disenfranchised and outcasts. This is not entirely true, if the Gospel biographies are to be believed in any way. They show him giving equal time to the most disparate segments of humanity. He isn't cloistered in some cozy, insulate corner, preaching to the choir of his like-minded fan club, but he also isn't relegated to the ragged, gritty neglected people of the street either. Yes, he dines with sinners and tax collectors, but also in the house of a respected Pharisee, surrounded by skeptical religious elites. He extends his hand to heal a despised leper, but does the same for the servant of an occupation Roman soldier whose faith moves him. He preaches on a hillside to the poor and disenfranchised, yet regularly speaks in synagogues amid the experts and insiders. He counsels both a curious Pharisee named Nicodemus who comes to him under the cover of night and a shunned Samaritan woman at a public well in the heat of the day. Jesus was a shepherd, a pastor to the wide swath of humanity that crossed his path, caring for all of these people with the same fervency and reverence. Even the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Jewish religious elite for whom he saved his most pointed criticisms, received his presence and welcome. And this is perhaps one of the most challenging things we face as we seek to personally emulate him: equally embracing those we find unpleasant or unlovable or unworthy of welcome. We all have (as U2 singer Bono calls them) "lepers in our heads," those we keep at a distance, people we would rather not see seated at our table, those we elevate ourselves above." p.71-72

QUESTION: What do you think of John Pavlovitz's observation of who Jesus is? What does this mean for us as his disciples? What challenges does it present?

QUESTION: Who are the "lepers in your head" —the people you would rather not be seated with?

QUESTION: How do we embody "radical hospitality"? What does it look like as the Church? As individuals?
