

9/4/11 Sermon

"Radical Hospitality"

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Radical hospitality is about our spiritual journey to find the essence of what it means to be human in each other. When we enter these doors, each of us brings our deepest yearning for acceptance and darkest fears. We long for an extended hand of friendship, a connection to others and, perhaps unconsciously, to the holy.

To be truly welcoming of the outsider, the poor, the pilgrim, and members alike, we must open our hearts with a deep soul-filled welcome and offer love for another as deep as we want for ourselves.

We cannot grow a heart or spirit alone ...we need others and the gifts they bring to this melting pot. Jesus knew that and said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself".

To be welcoming is a choice. That decision will determine the kind of person we will become.

Our willingness to offer radical hospitality will affect whether we build a congregation strong enough to hold together in the face of constant change.

Our choice to offer radical hospitality is the living embodiment of our core value of respect, beginning with deep listening with the "ear of your heart" (Daniel Homan—"Radical Hospitality").

I urge you to trust your inner heart voice, listen to it. Try to remain open to the wisdom of the other, no matter how hard it is to hear or trust a stranger. First, find out what a guest is seeking, what is their unique path that brought them to this sacred space. Listen to the holy in their words. See the yearning for acceptance we all have.

Hospitality is about more than a hand shake. It is about mutual reverence, vital to creating a loving relationship.

Our goal needs to be about creating safe space where one can be free to be alone, to meditate, rest in safety or engaged with others.

Homan writes, our purpose in the Benedictine way is to "offer an open heart, a stance of availability and to look for God [however you understand that]

lurking in every single person who comes through the door. . . We can never develop a higher relationship with others [or the transcendent] than we can develop with ourselves”.

We grow through our encounters with others. We learn about ourselves as we feel love or even when we are annoyed, grieved or feel respected.

The love and welcome we are called to offer has many impediments deeply felt: fear, narcissism and suspicion of the stranger next door or sitting next to us this morning.

If we are to offer love from the core of deep hospitality, I am asking you to do something scary and radical: open your arms and heart to another, for if we do not find the path to being more open, we will surely become more isolated and hostile to strangers and each other. We will begin to mistrust one another and our motives and actions.

Your response will determine whether we build a faith community authentically striving to live its values, with respect for the holy in strangers and members alike, or sink into being a social club.

Homan writes, “we are called to be the kind stranger, to be kind to strangers and to hold our breath in wonder at the healing power of the stranger among us”.

Each of us brings our own pain to UUMAN that needs healing, compassion and understanding. We can offer all that and so much more, if we make healing of closed hearts part of our spiritual journey.

Open your hearts, my friends. An open heart can never be bitter or selfish for long. Listen with the “ear of your heart” and you will find the holy within yourself and each other. You will feel safer, less suspicious, and make a companion out of a stranger. I believe that when we take the time, and risk offering radical hospitality, we can solve any problem, heal any wound, find a better way out of fear and suspicion, and perhaps even create — one person at a time — a better world.

What we need is acceptance. Whether we understand each other or not, we can still accept one another. We can never truly know another, but instead of building walls that separate, we can build relationships that can heal a broken world. Acceptance is really about receiving, rather than judging.

It goes beyond mere tolerance. It is welcoming another in the moment, flaws and all.

Acceptance is not easy. We do it in fits and starts, not perfectly and not all the time, for this is an ongoing challenge. It is unrelenting, in Homan's words, "love, acceptance and reconciliation".

This is the truth of radical hospitality...all are valued in their flawed humanity. Every experience, every life is sacred in the way God spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

Take off your shoes, for the ground you walk upon is holy ground.

Holy ground is that place where we are accepted when we feel rejected, violated, misunderstood and betrayed or dispirited. It is a place of welcome into the light of unconditional love.

This love I speak of is composed of little acts of kindness and giving, piled one atop another, piling up to create a huge force capable of negating rejection, pushing back darkness and transforming the world.

It is little acts that matter: welcoming the Christian, when we are a humanist or its reverse; it is accepting that others have a different view of life than we do; it is listening before talking; it is stretching ourselves to move out of our comfort zone and be willing to address the tough questions around racism and other anti-oppression issues.

These differences are not a threat, but an opportunity to add new dimensions to the beautiful tapestry of our faith.

A new person can teach us to willingly explore the new and untried, to see the old in a new light. Our holy places must be where we risk the new, the untried, and the stranger.

Here we are encouraged to throw off fear and open our hearts to new hope and love. Moses, as we have, found that holy ground was risky, but his encounter led to the freeing of his people. Who knows where our experience of the holy will lead us, for this space is pregnant with hope and genuine love.

In Homan's words, "we are all explorers seeking the holy, we are all a little lost and are all looking for a place to rest for a while."

To deny another safe haven is to close the doors to our own radical welcome.

Lest we forget, we are all guests here, strangers in a strange land. If we are to get home to our truest selves, we who have gathered here need to seek the sacred within each other as part of our worship.

I pray, let us on the dawning of each new day, extend an open hand and wait for the wonder to happen. The love that will come to us is the essence of radical hospitality.