

“Radical Hospitality”

Five Fruitful Practices, part 1

Genesis 18:1-15

[title slide] Good morning. Would you take a moment, turn to your neighbor, and tell him or her, “I’m so glad you are here with us today.”? It’s true. We cannot be the church alone. We need each other to serve Christ and this community. You are not here by accident; you are in the right place. God knows you, God sees you, and God loves you.

Would you please pray with me? “Lord, if you have anything you want to tell me this morning, I’m ready to listen. Search me and know me. Test my heart, reveal any anxiety within me that doesn’t need to be there, and show me how to live in your right paths. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”

Without looking at the cover of your bulletin, can you tell me, what is the purpose of the church? (*Solicit answers.*) **[UMC SLIDE]** We exist to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Everything we do is centered on loving and serving Jesus Christ. We want everyone to have a loving relationship with God.

Churches who are accomplishing this purpose are said to be “fruitful.” Like growing plant, a church produces fruit, and the best fruit God will grow in this place is disciples who have a love each other and love God.

[BOOK] A United Methodist bishop by the name of Robert Schnase wrote a book called Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations. Over the next five weeks, we will take an honest look at how our church measures up in these five areas: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission, and Extravagant Generosity. What kind of fruit are we growing?

The first practice is called “Radical Hospitality.” Most people have some idea of what “hospitality” is. The study of hospitals, right? Ah, no. Hospitality is the practice of making someone feel welcome.

When has someone made you feel at home? Maybe you had a nice meal at someone’s house. Maybe you were traveling, and someone took you in.

[Kapama Lodge] In 2019, I traveled in South Africa and enjoyed excellent hospitality. We visited people’s home and places of work. We stayed in hotels and lodges. We visited houses of worship, including a mosque. Everywhere we

went, people served us and treated us with respect. I was almost embarrassed, I was treated so well. South Africa has excellent hospitality.

However, today we're not talking about excellent hospitality. Today we ask ourselves, “Do we practice radical hospitality?” There is a difference. Let me explain. At Kapama Safari Lodge, hospitality was expected and had something to do with making a profit. Although it was sincere, their profession had a self-serving motive. Radical hospitality in the church, however, has nothing to do with making money. It's about going out of your way to welcome people in the name of the Lord.

[Abraham] In Genesis 18, we see a model of radical hospitality in Abraham as he greeted his three unexpected visitors. His speech oozes with humility. “If I have found favor with you, my lord...” “I am your servant.” His words and kindness honor his guests.

Abraham understates everything he does. He claims he only has a little water to wash their feet, and a little bite to eat...one translation calls his offering “a morsel”. But then he runs back to his wife Sarah to make the best bread possible. He finds the best calf to roast. This is no little morsel. This was a feast!

Note the urgency of Abraham's movements. Abraham does not waste their time. He takes care of his guests immediately. In fact, he was prepared even before they showed up! Sarah had the flour ready. A calf could be slaughtered at a moment's notice. Abraham practiced this lifestyle constantly. This was not a one-time, spontaneous action.

This is how we are meant to serve and honor our guests in this place. People notice excellence and generosity. In South Africa, they put out new table cloths for every meal. They didn't skimp on the food. They hovered around us, refilling every dish. They smiled constantly and remarked it was their pleasure to serve us. Similarly, Abraham chooses the best bread and meat. Abraham is generous. He finds pleasure in welcoming his guests.

Notice Abraham stands while his guests eat. Abraham constantly thought of their comfort first. He didn't need a thank you. He did not mention how he might have liked to eat his best calf, or how hard Sarah worked to make the bread. Abraham's actions are completely selfless, showing radical hospitality.

Would someone write a similar story about how we treat people in our church? All of us agree that hospitality is a good thing. The truth is, God calls each of us to practice radical hospitality right here at Grace UMC.

Is our hospitality radical? Does our hospitality show every person we encounter that we desire them to know God’s grace and love through Jesus Christ? How far are we willing to go to show it?

[Bible verses – Romans and Matthew] God doesn’t ask us to do something God has not already done for us. God shows us radical hospitality! Romans 15:7 says, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” In Matthew 20:38, Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

God shows us hospitality all the time. God created the world for us to live in and enjoy. We have everything we need. And most of all, when we break God’s law, God offers us forgiveness through the cross of Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant himself. Christ was the epitome of radical hospitality and service. He changed water to wine, he healed, he forgave, he even washed the disciples’ dirty feet.

[Bible verses – Deuteronomy] God commands to practice hospitality. Here’s what Deuteronomy 10:17-19 says: “The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, ... who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

God expects us to offer hospitality because we were once strangers. As the Israelites were strangers in Egypt, we were also strangers to God. We didn’t know God, we didn’t love God, but this amazing grace met us where we were. That’s Radical Hospitality, to offer kindness not only to complete strangers, but, dare I say, to enemies of God. For the truth is, in our sin, that’s what we were.

This is the Radical Hospitality we are supposed to give to others, out of the gratefulness of what God has done for us.

Stop and think about what it would be like to walk into this room not knowing a single soul. Here is a possible scenario from Schnase’s book:

[Mother] (Page 13.) “A young single mom stands awkwardly in the foyer with her toddler, looking around at all the people she does not know on her first visit to a church... She is wondering about child care, self-conscious about the fussiness of her little one, unsure where the bathroom is, too timid to ask directions, doubting whether this is the right worship service for her, or whether this is even the right church. Where is she to sit, what is it going to feel like to sit alone with her child, and what if her little one makes too much noise? She feels the need for prayer; for some connection to others; for something to lift her above the daily grind of her job, the unending bills, the conflicts with her ex-husband, and her worries for her child.

“Now imagine what would happen if people took Jesus’ words seriously. They would look at this woman and the whole bundle of hopes and anxieties, desires and discomforts that she carries and think, “This is a member of Jesus’ family, and Jesus wants us to treat her as we would treat Jesus himself if he were here.”

Why have you come here today? What are you looking for? Hopefully for the same things she is – grace, love, and hope from heaven.

Friends, are there some things we need to do differently to show radical hospitality to the others in our midst? I think there are.

[Boy and pews] Take this simple example: where you sit communicates without saying a single word. How close, how far away you sit from each other. Who sits in the front and the back. Look down. Is your name embroidered in your pew cushion? Some people are upset when they find someone else sitting in “their” pew. That’s not practicing hospitality! Radical Hospitality is not only sitting together, it’s inviting someone to sit with you, while leaving the back rows for latecomers. It’s coming early, not late, so a new person isn’t standing awkwardly wondering if the church is closed or everyone’s sick. It’s having a conversation with someone to make them feel at home. Most people decide within ten minutes of arriving on Sunday morning whether or not they will ever come back. That’s well before the sermon, friends.

Simple hospitality is not Radical Hospitality. Radical Hospitality causes us to sacrifice something for the sake of the other. Radical Hospitality is choosing to be

a servant in worship, going up to someone you don't know, saying, “Hi. I'm Eric. I don't believe we've met.” (But please use your real name!) Offering to show someone where the nursery and bathrooms are, not simply pointing and saying, “Over there.” Radical Hospitality means we care so much for a person that we will do anything so that they will know the love and grace of Christ.

[Bible verses] Hebrews 13:2 says “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Abraham entertained angels. We could be welcoming someone even greater. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

We offer radical hospitality, because all of these things we can do, no matter how costly and uncomfortable, we do for Jesus. Jesus knows our hearts, our motivation for serving or not. We should see the image of God in every person. We should see something redeemable in every person. We should know, regardless of how they respond to our hospitality, that we are being obedient to Christ. We can see them as God sees them. And when we do, radical hospitality won't seem so radical anymore, it will be natural, and it will be done out of love.

[title slide] Will we do this? Will everything in our building and our worship, our actions and demeanor say we treat our guests well? Or will our hospitality simply be a weak smile, a handshake, and, “Here's your bulletin?” That's OK hospitality, but not radical.

We are conduits of God's love and grace. Our attitudes and actions on Sunday morning towards others, strangers or friends, can be a bridge or an obstacle to someone having a loving relationship with God. Let us show radical hospitality to all. Let us entertain angels. Let us serve the least of these, because ultimately, we are doing this for Christ, not ourselves.

Will you pray with me?

Memory Verses:

Romans 15:7 - “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Hebrews 13:2 “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Reflection questions:

1. When were you welcomed into an unfamiliar place? What or who made you feel at ease?
2. How did you become a part of this congregation? What activities and people opened the doors for you? What obstacles made it difficult to feel like you belonged?
3. How do you feel about talking to other people about GUMC? When and how have you invited someone to participate in a ministry of our church?
4. What is one activity we could do with excellence and consistency that would have the greatest impact on offering Radical Hospitality in our congregation?