

DEEPER:
A Return To The Shoreline
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Susan stood awkwardly in the foyer of the church with her toddler and six year old by her side. Looking at all the people she did not know, she hesitated, wondering if this was really such a good idea. She had been by the church a couple of times and had even brought the kids to one of its children's functions, where she had been invited to attend a church service. They seemed friendly and so she had accepted their invitation, but she was suddenly having second thoughts. And yet, deep down inside she knew that she needed to be here.

And so, standing at the entrance, she pushed herself towards the group of people that had gathered in the coffee area. She had been greeted and had even been remembered by one of the people from the children's program. She had been offered a cup of coffee and each of her children were offered juice and a cookie. She had talked to several people, and been greeted warmly during the greeting time in the service. Her children went up front during the Children's Moment and they were all smiles when they returned with a piece of candy. She had liked the music and enjoyed the sermon. After the service ended, she said goodbye to the pastor who was standing at the door and then made her way to her car. The people had been kind and friendly and the new building was really nice. She buckled her children in the backseat, got into the car, found her keys and started the engine.

But as she started to put the car in drive, tears filled her eyes. The emptiness that had been in her heart when she pulled into the parking lot was still there. She was still facing financial struggles and there were still rumors that her job was going to be eliminated during the next round of layoffs. She still needed to address the issue of missed child support payments and her relationship with her ex-husband was at an all-time low. And while there was no doubt that she loved her children, the pressures of being a single mom were at times overwhelming. ON top of all that, she still had to call her doctor back because one of her recent tests had come back abnormal. She drove out of the parking lot, pretty much in the same shape she had come in.

You know...this story could have easily happened at our church. The struggles that are facing our fictitious Susan are real life struggles that are common to many people in our community. It is a story about a person's life that is not going well, and in the midst of their struggle they decide to take a risk...decide to reach out beyond themselves...decide to risk church.

We have a wonderful opportunity on Sunday morning to make a difference in a person's life, but in order to practice Radical – Authentic Hospitality it will take more than a cup of coffee or a cookie or a friendly greeting. While those are great starting places and we should continue to do them, those actions alone will not help us to cross the bridge to connectedness.

**Radical – Authentic Hospitality is really Grace-filled Hospitality
And Grace-filled hospitality is grace-filled because it reflects the heart of God... and
the heart of God is all about relationships.**

And today we are going to look more closely at this authentic grace-filled hospitality.
So let's start by taking out our sermon notes and ask ourselves:

How does a fully committed follower of Christ live, so as to become an effective
witness to those, like our fictitious Susan, who are at Stage Two?

So what exactly is Stage Two?

Well Stage Two is part of the Ocean Diagram that Dan and I have been talking about for
the past few weeks.

We called Stage Two the Shoreline and it represented that person, much like our
fictitious Susan, who is Curious about coming to church and what it might offer them.
However, they have a heightened sensitivity to all that is going on around them.
After all this is a new experience for them in many ways – maybe it is the first time they
have come to church or maybe they are returning after being gone for a while and are
unsure of how they will be received.

Whatever the reason, they are very aware of their surroundings.

And we have an amazing and awesome opportunity to help them decide that this decision
they made to come to church was a good decision by practicing grace-filled hospitality.

So again the question is:

How does a fully committed follower of Christ live, so as to become an effective
witness to those at Stage Two?

And The principle that speaks to this question or the target on the wall that we are aiming
at is this:

A fully committed follower: (let's say it together)

2. Extends authentic hospitality in response to a forgiven life.

A follower of Christ understands s/he is saved by God's grace through faith in
Jesus alone, that Jesus paid the fine for the sins of all, and all are deserving of that same
grace. As a result, a follower extends authentic hospitality and acceptance to others
without discrimination.

So what exactly is authentic hospitality?

Well first let's see what the dictionary has to say about hospitality.

Hospitality –the relationship between guest and host, this includes the reception and
entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers - generously providing care and kindness to
whoever is in need.

The Greek word for hospitality is:

**Philoxenos - *Philo* – brotherly love
Xenos – stranger**

So then Hospitality is brotherly love extended to a stranger.
And brotherly love seems like it is more than just handing a person a cookie or saying hello to them. **Brotherly love, to me, goes beyond.**

I want to stop for just a moment today and give a practical lesson of hospitality. I will come back to this lesson at the end of my sermon today also. So here is what I want you to do.

9:00 service

I have asked the ushers to bring the red attendance books forward at this time and pass them out to each pew. What I would like you to do is fill out the information requested in the book and then pass it down the pew. Pass it back up the pew when everyone is done so that you can see who you are sitting with and Then greet those around you by name, especially if you don't know who you are sitting by.

I am going to have Stephanie play for just a couple of minutes to give you time to do this.

10:30 service

I want you to all stand. I want you to go and greet someone you do not know – introduce yourself and find out their name and one fact about them, like where they live or if they have children or grandchildren, etc.

I am going to give you 2 minutes.

(COUNTDOWN FROM 10 TO 1)

**Turn with me to Luke 7: 36 and let's see what Jesus has to say to us about hospitality.
Read 36-40 pg _____**

First let me point out that hospitality involves risk.

In Jesus day a meal such as this would not have been a private affair – the whole village would have known that a great rabbi was in town.

So people could have come to the party and sat around the edges of the room to listen to the rabbi speak.

This woman would have not been welcome there but that didn't stop her.

She would not have been treated kindly but that didn't stop her.

She would have been looked down upon and spoken about in hushed tones – but that didn't stop her.

She risked all of that just to be near her Lord.

She risked the chance that someone would stop her when she wept and wiped her Lord's feet with her tears and hair.

She risked the talk and the ridicule just to lavish her love and hospitality on her Lord so that he would be more comfortable and welcomed.

She risked stepping out of her own comfort zone for the sake of another.

So let me ask you:

What are you willing to risk for the sake of hospitality to a stranger?
Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone and speak to someone you may not know so that they feel more welcome?

Are you willing to risk inviting someone new to your discipleship group to get to know them better and help them to grow in their knowledge of the Lord?

A moment ago I asked each of you to risk stepping out of your comfort zone, sign a book and then greet another person that you may not have known by name.

Wonder what risk someone might have taken – beyond a cup of coffee, beyond a hello - that would have made Susan, from our story, feel more welcomed and comfortable? That would have made her want to return in order to learn more about Jesus and his love?

Second - Hospitality involves sacrifice.

This woman at Simon's house not only stepped out of her comfort zone and took a risk, But she also was willing to sacrifice something of great value to her for the sake of another.

The alabaster jar that she broke and the perfume that she poured on the Lord would have been one of - if not the most prized possession she owned.

Many Jewish women wore these perfume flasks around their necks on a cord because they did not want it out of their sight even for a moment – it was that special to them.

You didn't just take the lid off of the jar and use the perfume.

You would have had to break the top and pour out the perfume and so once used – what was once priceless and precious became worthless.

That was the sacrifice this woman was willing to offer – the price she was willing to pay – the value she placed on extending hospitality to Jesus.

So again let me ask you:

What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of hospitality to another?

Would you be willing to sacrifice going to lunch with your friends after service in order to go with a new person, or maybe invite them to join you and your friends so you could introduce them to others?

What if someone had taken Susan to lunch?

Would you be willing to sacrifice your seat on a Sunday to a stranger?

Come on – you know that most of you go to the very same pew, the very same seat every Sunday. What if next Sunday you sat some place else?

Not by your friends but made a point of sitting by a person you didn't know well? If you sit on the right, you would sit on the left, if you sit in the back, you would move to the front?

Would you sacrifice talking to your friends out in the Gathering Area and talk with someone you didn't know and get to know them better?

You know in all honesty, we may be willing to risk and we may be willing even to sacrifice.

But there is one very important element that makes all the difference in the way we go about doing those two things.

And that is WHY we do them.

And that why is the difference between us extending hospitality out of obligation or out of grace.

Look with me again at Luke 7: 44-47

READ

The bible says Jesus turned toward the woman but spoke to Simon

And in essence he said this:

You didn't give me water for my feet – which is the obligatory hospitable thing to do.

But she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair – which is the radical, authentic, grace-filled hospitable thing to do.

You didn't kiss me – again obligatory hospitality.

She hasn't stopped kissing my feet - radical, authentic, grace-filled hospitality.

You didn't pour oil on my head – obligatory hospitality.

She poured perfume, her most valued possession, on my feet - grace-filled hospitality.

Obligatory Hospitality is a mandatory or required type of hospitality.

You know the kind – you have all received it probably at some point in time.

Maybe a restaurant seated you and took your order and delivered your meal but it was done almost as if you were an imposition to the waitress.

Then you have been at that restaurant where the waitress smiled, asked how you were, could she do anything or get you anything that would make your meal more enjoyable.

And you left knowing you would be back again.

Recently I went to Kansas on a business trip and the hotel we stayed at was amazing.

We were greeted by a couple of different people when we walked in or out of the door.

Our rooms were lovely.

The place was clean.

They offered us a breakfast with a chef fixing your omelets anyway you wanted for free.

I told Ann –remember this hotel because if we have to go back again – that is where I want to stay. They **went above and beyond.**

Maybe when our fictitious Susan went to the church, the people greeted her and gave her a cup of coffee nicely –

but nobody really talked to her, or asked to sit with her, or if they could help show her where to take her kids to Sunday school, **nobody went beyond.**

Obligatory hospitality.

Then there is Grace-filled Hospitality

[Hospitality that reflects the heart of God in our lives.](#)

Our principle stated it this way:

A follower of Christ understands s/he is saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus alone, that Jesus paid the fine for the sins of all, and all are deserving of that same grace. As a result, a follower extends authentic hospitality and acceptance to others without discrimination.

This one principle is one of the driving forces in my life and why I do what I do for Christ.

Although I had gone to church all of my life, even in the midst of doing drugs and alcohol, even in the midst of being abused, even in the midst of failed marriages, even in the midst of my shame and guilt – I had never really allowed the forgiveness of Christ to enter my heart. I felt too shameful and sin filled.

Oh I understood in my head that Jesus had died for my sins and that I had been forgiven. But when that reality really sank into my heart and I finally understood that Christ had died for me, that he had cried for me in the midst of all my pain and confusion, in the midst of all my suffering and abuse, in the midst of my anger and loneliness, that I was deserving of the same grace as those around me – **it made all the difference in the world for me.**

I knew I would spend the rest of my life doing whatever it took to extend that love and grace to others without discrimination or judgment.

Since I am unable to pour out my love on my Lord's feet as the woman in the bible did, that means that Jesus wants me to pour it out on those whom he loves.

Jesus tells us in Matthew –“I was a stranger and you invited me in....Whenever you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.”

So there is nothing I will not risk or sacrifice if it means that one more person understands completely in their head and their heart that Jesus died for them, that he loves them, that he forgives them, exactly as they are, exactly where they are and for exactly who they are.

Do you love Jesus? Say YES!

I know you do and although:

We don't have the opportunity that this woman in the bible did to actually wash our Lord's feet today, we do have the opportunity to welcome the Susan's into our midst in Jesus' name, to help them overcome their heightened sensitivity and to help them move beyond the shoreline out into the waves.

As we continue to go deeper into spiritual life - we have the opportunity as FULLY COMMITTED FOLLOWERS OF JESUS TO

2. *Extend authentic hospitality in response to a forgiven life.*

Each and every Sunday as we welcome in the stranger in our midst and we **go beyond obligatory to grace-filled hospitality.**

Blessing

May God grant you risk taking courage and

Self-sacrificing love to share your grace-filled hospitality with the stranger you welcome in this week in Jesus' name.

Have a great week with God and go change your world in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN