

## **Hospitality ~ June 26, 2011**

### **Matthew 10:40-42; Psalm 13**

There was a review of the play “Cripple of Inishmaan” in the Courant recently. The reviewer writes, “In his sardonic comedy set in 1934, Inishmaan is a place where kind-heartedness is a cruel liability. The residents indulge in self-absorbed carping and hold onto grievances for dear life, hurl plainspoken insults and revel in gossip that serves as their sole source of entertainment and social cohesion.” Inishmaan, an island, sounds like a pretty inhospitable place. It represents the antithesis of the hospitality we are called to present to others as the basis of our faith system.

Hospitality is defined as “the relationship between guest and host, or the act or practice of being hospitable. Specifically, this includes the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers.....” (Wikipedia) There is a whole industry built around “hospitality.” This is the paid for product that makes guests and customers feel at home when they are out of their element.

This morning’s scripture reading speaks of the practice of a more personal kind of hospitality, the kind we extend to one another in our own lives. Jesus was telling his disciples and us, that we are to welcome one another, both those we know and those we don’t, with a special openness and kindness that will extend far beyond our actions, causing a ripple effect that, at one point in time, can change the way people look at and treat friends and strangers.

We all know how we feel when someone approaches us who we do not like at all. It might be someone who has attacked us in one way or other in the past, or someone who has ignored us because we are not in the same social circle, or someone who has been on the opposite side of an issue. We become a little defensive and, maybe, even a little hostile. When we feel this way, we cannot open the doors of hospitality and welcome someone on an equal footing. We do this because we have the human need to defend and protect ourselves. It takes a lot of courage and strength and love to overcome these feelings. But, we are assured, by the words in our sacred writings, that we have it in ourselves to set aside whatever has gone on in the past and to move forward as new and renewed human beings. When we are able to do this we discover we have a new attitude toward all of life.

We find a freshness in life, a new view of things, a release from whatever has kept us in an ugly grip of anger and resentment. At this point we can move into becoming the welcoming beings Jesus wanted us to become.

Henry Nouwen wrote a little book years ago that was required reading when I entered seminary. The title of this little book is Reaching Out. In it Nouwen considers three basic movements in life. The first is “From Loneliness to Solitude.” In it he stresses the goodness of being alone and learning to embrace the silence and solitude that can be ours that will lead us to a deeper more fulfilling life. The second movement is “From Hostility to Hospitality.” This is the movement we are considering this morning. And, the third is ,” From Illusion to Prayer.” It is a very thoughtful little book and everyone can learn something from it.

In the second movement, he wrote:

In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors,

friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. Although many, we might even say most, strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings. The movement from hostility to hospitality is hard and full of difficulties. Our society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm. But still—that is our vocation: to convert the *hostis* into *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced. (pp. 65-66)

Do we know of such a space in our society? A space where we can be who we are and be welcomed and given a chance to grow into all we can be? Is there a place we enter that we find a sense of relief that we are loved and accepted just as we are? Where there are no strange looks and attitudes, but where everything leads us to comfort and peace? A place where hostility is set aside and the focus is on hospitality?

This place should be such a place. A place where people gather to sense the closeness of God and the closeness of one another no matter what positions they may take outside of this space. In here we are called to love and hospitality, to understanding, patience and peace. We are called to see one another as the children of God, each valued and appreciated. We are called to extend hospitality to everyone as they enter our doors, stranger and friend alike, yes, even Democrat and Republican and Unaffiliated alike, even those for and those against one human little thing or another, even those we find difficult to understand and love. We are called or commanded, not by a rule of the church or of the society at large but by and through the words of Jesus. “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent

me.” We are called to carry hospitality with us and within us wherever we may be and to create a space where it can grow and overtake the hostility of the world.

*-- Amen*

Nouwen, Henry, Reaching Out, the Three Movements of the Spiritual Life,

Image Books (Doubleday) New York, 1975.