

1 Sermon, November 17, 2011

Texts: Mark 14:12-16, Luke 19:1-10, 1Kings 17:8-15

Title: "Waiting for Jesus, the Guest"

In India, a few weeks ago, we had the experience of being guests in many homes. When we were served a meal, certain things invariably happened:

- One or two women cooked in the kitchen, out of our sight.
- The women and/or children served the meal.
- The men, if present, sat at table with us.
- A prayer was offered before the meal.
- We were served meat (often more than one kind) even if the family did not eat much meat.
- Every effort was made to accommodate the needs of the guest.

In one home, when it was explained that I could not drink the water because I wasn't used to it, the family sent one of the children out to buy bottled water for me. I had said I didn't need water, but they wanted me to have it.

We were overwhelmed by the hospitality we received at eight different homes.

We wondered why sometimes the women didn't eat with us, but learned that in the traditional Indian extended family, the children eat first and are then sent to bed, then the men eat, and finally the women eat.

My wife, Marianne, was served with the men, as kind of an honorary man!

It gives new meaning to the story of Zacchaeus, when we think of Jesus inviting himself over to Zacchaeus' home, Jesus wasn't asking as much of Zacchaeus as he was asking of Zacchaeus' wife and servants.

Jesus probably would have been served silently by women who would then withdraw to the kitchen.

Our first hymn today is one that we'll sing all four Sundays of Advent, as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ child.

The first verse ends: "Love, the guest is on the way."

Have you ever really thought of Jesus as a guest?

2 Sermon, November 17, 2011

There is a little sign that I saw when I went to India 34 years ago. I saw it again when I went there this time. The sign reads:

Christ is the head of this house
The unseen guest at every meal
The silent listener to every conversation

How does that strike you? Do you think of Jesus as the unseen guest at every meal? Is Jesus truly present whenever two or three gather together at the table and pray a prayer in his name?

This is the first Sunday of Advent, when we think of not only the coming of the Christ child, but also of Christ coming again.

When we think of Jesus coming again, what do we think of? The sky being rent in two, earthquakes, and so on?

What if we were to think of Jesus coming again as our guest?

It's a simple idea. Would we do things differently if Jesus were coming over for supper? Would we talk differently, behave differently?

Would things be different in Congress if each member of Congress had to have Jesus over?

Would things be different if television producers had to have Jesus to dinner?

Would things be different if the heads of major banking institutions were to have Jesus over to supper?

You can expand that idea. If president Assad of Syria were to have to get ready to have Jesus over, would there be so much violence and repression in Syria?

Now, it's a little cheap of me to point my fingers at the big and powerful without also pointing a finger at myself. I talk about powerful people, but how can I expect powerful people to behave like Jesus was their guest when I don't always behave that way.

Besides that, I am more powerful than I give myself credit for. I have influence and resources that I don't use. So, if Zacchaeus offered to give half of his wealth to the poor, what am I called to do? When Jesus

3 Sermon, November 17, 2011

comes to sit at my table, am I willing to make amends like Zacchaeus did?

Zacchaeus was wealthy, but I am wealthy, too. I doubt that Zacchaeus had more square footage in his home than I do. Zacchaeus had servants, but I have a dishwasher, a clothes washer and dryer and a vacuum cleaner. Certainly those make up for servants.

Zacchaeus had more than he needed; so do I. So when Jesus comes over to dinner, what will I do that puts my values and faith into practice?

Now, the idea of Jesus coming over to dinner stirs up some other emotions, too.

Maybe fear – “will I be accepted by him?”

Maybe delight – “I’ve been waiting for this so long!”

Maybe confusion – “why is Jesus coming to visit ME?”

Well, I can answer some of those feelings by telling you that, over and over, when in the Bible a holy person visits a home, it is to offer a blessing.

Abraham and Sarah received angels, and then Sarah conceived and bore a son.

Mary, the mother of Jesus had an angel visit, and was similarly blessed.

Elijah visited a widow in the town of Zarephath, and they were blessed with flour and oil that would not run out.

Elisha came and purified the water in a well

Elisha brought back to life a boy who had died.

Jesus visited homes and cured Peter’s mother in law, raised to life a girl who had died, turned water into wine, and blessed Lazarus’ sister Mary in her desire to learn.

Over and over in the scriptures, when a holy man comes to visit, it is in order to bless those in the home.

Now, I’m not suggesting any magic is going to take place if we set a spare chair out for Jesus and invite him to be present in our dining room. You can’t manipulate God by trying to impress God.

What I am suggesting is that when we focus our hearts and minds on welcoming Jesus into our homes, our homes become better places. They become places of healing and hospitality and sharing. When we

4 Sermon, November 17, 2011

focus our hearts and minds on welcoming Jesus into our homes, our thinking shifts from "what do I want?" to "what does God want?".

Problems don't disappear, but they are put into perspective.

I like how, in today's reading from Mark, two disciples are sent into the city to prepare a Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples. Nothing really miraculous happens, but all their worries disappear, as everything falls into place. They see a man with a water jug, follow him and then ask the owner of the home for a place to celebrate Passover, and the owner says, "Yes. Here come and take a look at the room.

We don't know if the owner then said to the two disciples, "That will be 50 shekels in advance."

Not really miraculous, but it all works out. It all falls into place.

When we prepare a place in our home for Christ Jesus, that's the way it works. Our home doesn't have to be perfect and spotless. Christ comes in and everything has been prepared. It just falls into place.

Christ comes as our guest. Love, the guest, is on the way.

You can be sure that when Christ comes into our homes, he recognizes each home as holy ground. We may not remember that our homes and families are holy, but Jesus does.

Christ, the guest, steps into our homes and blesses them. Just like the many holy men in the Bible who stepped into a home, Christ blesses it, and blesses us.

Wouldn't the world be a better place if we remembered that every home is sacred ground, no matter the race of the person, or the faith practiced, or the social status of the person.

I was very aware of that in India. Our friend Satish and his wife, Victoria have a very nice home in an enclosed yard in the city of Dehradun. They have two bedrooms, a spare room, a kitchen, dining room, living room, 2 bathrooms and a covered porch.

But Satish's brother, Hem, has a very different home. Hem is an active pastor in the Methodist Church in India, and a very caring man. Hem walks three miles to church, and walks further to visit the homes of parishioners scattered around the church. He started a new church just a year ago, with satellite ministries around it.

Hem's home is a one-story home with a corrugated metal roof, with weights on top of the roof to make sure it stay in place. His home has

5 Sermon, November 17, 2011

only three rooms. One is a storage room in back. The second room is maybe about the size of our dining room, with an open fire built into the corner. This is where Hem's wife, Nancy, cooks. She has access to a lp gas-burning camp stove, but she prefers the old fashioned wood fire in the corner. The fire not only cooks, but heats the home, as well. There is no chimney in this room. Marianne and I went into this room but could only stand the smoke for so long. There's not much lighting in there, but there is a bed. Nancy probably sleeps on the bed, with the children sleeping on the floor. If there is a window, and I don't really remember, it is very small. The main light comes from the open doorway, which is probably mostly covered in winter.

The third room is Hem's room, where his books are, and there he prepares his sermons and teaching lessons. Hem invited Marianne and myself into his room, and we looked around and said, "So this is where you prepare your sermons!" But we couldn't think of anything else to say. Hem was proud of his home. He had built it himself. He owned the land. And he had a view of the snow-capped Himalayas in good weather.

Christ has clearly visited that home. That home is blessed.

That is something to keep in mind as we enter the busiest time of our year. We may spend a good deal of time decorating our home, or preparing for guests. But our home has already been blessed, and Christ will again be our guest.

Love, the guest, is on the way.

12It was the first day of the Festival of Thin Bread, and the Passover lambs were being killed. Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal?"

13Jesus said to two of the disciples, "Go into the city, where you will meet a man carrying a jar of water. **[α]** Follow him, **14**and when he goes into a house, say to the owner, 'Our teacher wants to know if you have a room where he can eat the Passover meal with his disciples.' **15**The owner will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished and ready for you to use. Prepare the meal there."

16The two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover meal.
(Mark 14:12-16, CEV)

6 Sermon, November 17, 2011

1 Jesus was going through Jericho, **2** where a man named Zacchaeus lived. He was in charge of collecting taxes **[a]** and was very rich. **3-4** Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like. But Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree. **5** When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today."
6 Zacchaeus hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus.

7 Everyone who saw this started grumbling, "This man Zacchaeus is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him."

8 Later that day Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "I will give half of my property to the poor. And I will now pay back four times as much **[b]** to everyone I have ever cheated." **9** Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today you and your family have been saved, **[c]** because you are a true son of Abraham. **[d]** **10** The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost." (Luke 19:1-10, CEV)

8 The LORD's word came to Elijah: **9** Get up and go to Zarephath near Sidon and stay there. I have ordered a widow there to take care of you. **10** Elijah left and went to Zarephath. As he came to the town gate, he saw a widow collecting sticks. He called out to her, "Please get a little water for me in this cup so I can drink." **11** She went to get some water. He then said to her, "Please get me a piece of bread."

12 "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any food; only a handful of flour in a jar and a bit of oil in a bottle. Look at me. I'm collecting two sticks so that I can make some food for myself and my son. We'll eat the last of the food and then die."

13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go and do what you said. Only make a little loaf of bread for me first. Then bring it to me. You can make something for yourself and your son after that. **14** This is what Israel's God, the LORD, says: The jar of flour won't decrease and the bottle of oil won't run out until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth." **15** The widow went and did what Elijah said. So the widow, Elijah, and the widow's household ate for many days. (1 Kings 17:8-15)