

My seminary advisor, Christine Pohl, studied hospitality in the Bible for her doctoral studies. She was the first one to point out to me that hospitality is the essence of who we are as the church—the household of God. The underground church in its early years slowly consumed the Roman Empire because it was rooted in hospitality driven by love, not fear. Love is infectious. Generous hospitality creates space for friendship.

The first to show hospitality in the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis is God—that is, after creation itself (the ultimate act of hospitality). Adam and Eve in the garden reveal the human struggle of thinking and choosing. They choose a course of action--eating a delicious fruit. Then they feel alone as they learn that choices and actions can have unexpected and undesirable consequences.

Here comes the divine hospitality. The Guardian and Keeper of the garden misses them and comes to find them. Now Adam and Eve must find clothing and work hard to grow their own food, giving birth to the generations in pain and uncertainty (each generation can't fathom how the next will make it. . .). Then, this Divine Caretaker provides clothing (and likely food) for them from among the Divine Flock, the “first” sacrifice for their provision. Now, if we read this text seeking a “literal,” historical meaning out of every word and action, this story can be quite baffling. But if we step back and allow it to be the narrative which speaks to our life struggle of thinking and choosing, then it is a provoking picture of life and salvation. The messy give and take between humans, creation, and God is the Divine Life Force of Merciful Love. We cringe at the messiness, but that is the reality in which we live.

Hospitality is our participation in the dance of mercy. It stretches us into the salvation of God, as unpleasant as that sometimes must be. The truth of the gospel of Grace is not a handy cure-all, but it is a commitment to the difficult work of nurturing relationships of love and mercy. Not to worry, it doesn't ultimately depend on us, but we are clearly part of the action. Feel the stretching? I do.

I find that the more truly and humbly grace-filled (like creation) our theology, the more true and real will be our walk with God in this garden of creation. If our theology is overly complicated and hard to understand, that is the work of humans rather than God. Understanding God is a matter of letting go of the need to understand God. Loving God draws us to generous acts of hospitality. What is your way of showing hospitality?

Peace, *Pastor Roy*