

Trained By the Master

I'm in the process of reading and re-reading a book by Bishop Robert Schnase titled "Five practices of Fruitful Congregations." He points out five essential practices to live by if we are going to be faithful disciples and congregations. Over the next five months I will be sharing some of his insights as well as my own on Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Extravagant Generosity.



Recently I had the great pleasure through the hospitality of a good friend to sit in a deer stand with him and my son just to enjoy nature. As we sat there in quiet conversation, my son said, "There's a deer." I turned to look, but saw no deer; my eyes aren't what they used to be. Greg patiently pointed it out to me.

Later as I thought about not being able to spot the deer I had to smile with pride. It was not many years ago when he was learning to hunt that the roles were reversed. That's when I had to point out the deer to him. I taught him to notice things in the woods, just like my father taught me. How to notice a curved white branch that was really a deer's antler, or a white spot that turned out to be part of a deer's tail, or that shiny spot of sunlight reflecting off a turkey's back. Good hunters don't learn to see game, but to study their environment and notice things that look different that might turn out to be the chance of a life time.

The Bible has only a few verses dealing with the rules of hospitality, but it is chock full of stories and parables that demonstrate hospitality. A general definition of hospitality is the practice of receiving or welcoming guests, extending kindness and generosity without reward. Biblical hospitality focuses on the treatment of strangers and anyone in need.

Most of us are willing to help someone when a need is brought to our attention, and many of us have preformed random acts of kindness. But hospitality is more than this. Hospitality is intentional acts of kindness. It's expecting and looking for opportunities to invite folks, welcome strangers and extend generosity to the needs of others.

A few weeks ago, Terry and I were dropping off the bulletins at the Buffalo Run Church, and there were two young men on bicycles in the parking lot. You know the type-- those bikers in their aerodynamic helmets and skin tight suits. The ones who drive me crazy riding down the middle of the road like they own it. The ones I'd like to . . . oops, sorry about that! Any way they were enjoying the view down the valley and as we prepared to leave Terry thought that those young men might like a drink or to use the bathroom, and so we offered. They declined and thanked us. I asked if they lived around here; if they where students, and if they rode out this way often. They said this valley was one of their favorites. I invited them to join us for worship some Sunday and gave them one of my cards.

Why do we so often miss opportunities for hospitality? Is it because we haven't allowed ourselves to be trained to notice them? As in my hunting example we need to study our environment at work, at the store, at the game or bank, in a parking lot--everywhere we go.

Learn to notice those who are having trouble in need of a hand and those standing in the margins or sitting alone. Notice those who are invisible to us most of the time. We need to listen to our conversations with others for hints they might be in need of encouragement or help with other physical needs, and then offer hospitality. We need to allow ourselves to be **Trained by the Master** Christ. The commands, stories, and teachings of the Bible are where we are trained by the master to see with his heart through our eyes.

Romans 15:7 says: *"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."*

We welcome because Christ first welcomed us through others. But take note of the driving motivation for our hospitality--It is for the glory of God!

When we offer hospitality for the wrong reasons-- to raise funds or to increase worship attendance-- it is no longer hospitality. Remember our definition of hospitality? To extend kindness without expectation of reward--just simply because that is what Christ has done for us-- for the glory of God.

We don't know if the young bikers will ever join us for worship, but if they ever find themselves in need of support from the Christian community maybe they'll remember a friendly invitation on a sunny autumn afternoon.

Blessings,

Pastor Duane