

**Sermon Transcript from October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016  
Sunday Candy (We Value Hospitality)  
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We're in the middle of a series on the values of our church and we've said that the values of our church, our stated values, are faith and humility. The last two weeks we've been talking about this. Faith and humility. And we have two more left. Hospitality and rootedness. So, faith, humility, hospitality and rootedness are the values of our church. Today, I want to talk about the huge value our church places on hospitality. We deeply value hospitality. We're not the best at it. We still are growing in the practice of becoming more hospitable. But, it's something that we very deeply value. We value it very deeply, this value of hospitality.

Now, before I get into the traditional sermon, I want to start our time in a bit of an unorthodox way. It's kind of fun. It's a bit different. I've told you this before and sometimes I'll even quote it. Almost every sermon that I write has some sort of soundtrack to it. Like, something I'm listening to as I'm preparing this sermon. Every single sermon does this. Something. And it ranges from what genre and all this other stuff. Usually, it's like a soundtrack that sets the tone or gives me color to kind of the essence that I want to written the sermon in.

So today, I want to play you a song. Now, I've never done this before and I remember vowing a long time ago before I was ever the pastor of this church that I would never do this. So, this might be the very first and last time I ever do this. But, I want to play you a song about hospitality. It's a song by a guy named Chance the Rapper. Many of you might know I've been kind of obsessed with him this year. It's not necessarily even about Chance. And I don't want to talk about that as much as I want to talk about his grandma, because that's what the song is about.

Chance was interviewed in a magazine a couple months ago and he was asked about the joy that comes out of his music. The writer of this article was saying like true joy, joy that's been through real pain and real sadness and real loss, but nevertheless it has this joy. "Where does this joy come from from you?"

And he told him a story that he said he hadn't told anybody, and he said that all this joy has come from a prayer that his grandma prayed over him. It began when she started praying and it sounded like a curse. He said at this time in his life he was doing a lot of drugs and he was gone all the time. Like, mentally gone. He went over to his grandma's house and he said, "She looked at me and she said, 'I don't like what's going on. I see it in your eyes. I don't like this.'"

And she says, "We're going to pray."

And he says, "You know, she's prayed for a long time. And usually really positive things."

But this time, this is what he said she prayed. She said, "Lord, I pray that all the things that are not like You that You would take away from Chance. Make sure that he fails at everything that is not like You. Take it away and turn it into dust."

And he's like, "Whoa. That sounds like a curse, not a prayer."

But, he said this was like a turning point for him and from that point on he embraced that and he said everything he would go on and do forward it would be with God. It would have to do with God. And he said that's where his joy comes from. So, Chance wrote a hymn, a Gospel hymn to his grandma thanking her for her hospitality. In this song he basically says that going to her house was like synonymous with going to church. Because, they would go to church when they went to their grandma's house and because going to grandma's house was like going into a sanctuary because Chance grew up on the violent south side of Chicago and he credits his grandma for protection and love as he grew up.

Now, some of you who don't follow hip-hop, let me explain to you what is about to happen right now. This song is called "Sunday Candy," and Chance's lines are written to his grandma. So, he's singing to his grandma, remembering and thanking her for her hospitality. Listen to his lyrics. They're so, so good. And then, the Gospel choir sings the part of his grandma. It's call and response like Gospel music is. So, the Gospel sings to Chance almost, and to us, the part of the grandma and sings to Chance. And this is what the chorus says, because I want you to get this. You might not get this.

"You gotta move it slowly,

Take and eat my body like it's holy.  
I've been waiting for you for the whole week,  
I've been praying for you, you're my Sunday candy."

Which means that his grandma sees his visits as a holy event, like a sacrament, like communion. "You coming over to my house is like a sacrament. It's a holy event that I take very seriously that I want to go slowly."

And then the chorus goes:

"Come on in this house, 'cause it's gonna rain."

Which is basically saying, "Come under the shelter of my life in my hospitality because it's going to be hard in this life. But, in my house, you will find rest. In my hospitality you will find shelter."

This is the SNL version of this song from last year. So, pay attention and enjoy. It probably won't get better than this today. I promise. So, here it is:

[Video]

Happy holidays.

"She can say in her voice, in her way that she love me  
With her eyes, with her smile, with her belt, with her hands, with her money.  
I am the thesis of her prayers.  
Her nieces and her nephews are just pieces of the layers,  
Only ones she love as much as me is Jesus Christ and Taylor.  
I got a future so I'm singing for my grandma!  
You singing too, but your grandma ain't my grandma.

Mine's is hand made, pan fried, sun dried,  
Southside, and beat the devil by a landslide.  
Praying with her hands tied, president of my fan club,  
Santa, something told me I should bring my butt to church!

You gotta move slowly,  
Take and eat my body like it's holy.  
I've been waiting for you for the whole week,  
I've been praying for you, you're my Sunday candy.

Come on in this house, 'cause it's gonna rain.  
(Momma, you know it's gon' rain.)  
Rain down Zion, it's gonna rain.  
(Momma, you know.)  
You've got to move slowly.

Momma, you know it's gon' rain.  
Momma, you know.

I come to church for the candy, your peppermints is the truth.  
I'm pessimistic on Monday if I had tweaked and missed you.  
You look so good with that hat on, had to match with the shoes,  
Came and dressed in the satin, I came and sat in your pew.  
I come to Christmas for dinner, fifty rolls on my plate  
Hella holes in my stocking holding your pockets in place.  
I like my love with the budget, I like my hugs with the scent  
You smell like light, gas, water, electricity, rent.  
You sound like why the gospel choir got so tired  
Singing His praises daily basis so I gotta try it.  
You're my dream catcher, dream team, team captain  
Matter fact, I haven't seen you in a minute, lemme take my butt to church!



Come on in this house, 'cause it's gonna rain.  
(Momma, you know it's gon' rain.)  
Rain down Zion, it's gonna rain.  
You better come on in this house, 'cause it's gonna rain.  
(Momma, you know.)

Momma, you know it's gon' rain.  
Father, you know.  
Promised you said it would rain.  
Finally, I'm home.  
You left on the light when I left on the flight but I made it alright.  
I've been waiting all week, I've been waiting all night  
Jason Van Dyke.

Had to say something on Saturday,  
See you at church on Sunday.  
Open mic coming on Monday.  
I wonder what the internet gon' say  
When SNL end with the indie  
Then the third tape slide down the chimney  
Via Kirsten, Kinsley, Lisa, Kenny, Taylor, Wendy, Austin win the Emmy, Mama Jan too.

You better come on in this house, cause it's gonna rain.  
(Momma, you know it's gon' rain.)  
Rain down Zion, it's gonna rain.

[End Video]

Wow. Yeah. So, literally can't follow that. So, let me read to you a few verses of Scripture. They're on the screen. You can write them down and refer to them later. But, I want you to listen to these words the best that you know how. So, listen to these words of Scripture. They're on the screen and then I'll pray.

Romans 12:9-13: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

Hebrews 13:2: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

Matthew 25:41-46: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They will also answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"And he will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

This is God's Word. Let's pray.

Lord, it's been our prayer as a staff and leadership and elders at this church that our church would be a place in this city, but especially a place, even for our own church, of hospitality. That's our value, God. We are so far from doing it well collectively. We really want to, though. I know there's some of our people and volunteers and community group hosts and people that are throwing parties for people that are coming home from not following

you that are doing great and there's a lot of us that are not. But, we want to. We see it. We see the effects of it. We know what it's like to be brought into someone's life in a hospitable way and we want to be hospitable people. So, God, we ask that You would fill us with Your Spirit, that You would teach us, that the things that rebuke us would be for our teaching and the things that encourage us would be for the fruitfulness and life of this church community. And I pray all these things in Your name and I ask that You'd give me strength to teach today. In Christ's name, amen.

It seems that hospitality is a bit on trend right now. From the Food Network, if you watch those type of Food Networky type of shows that always have programs showing you how to host themed parties like Halloween parties or whatever kind of parties, to magazines like Kinfolk. If you've ever heard of Kinfolk Magazine, which is like a \$20 magazine that blends expensive minimalism and hosting dinner parties for small groups of beautiful people. It's basically a magazine. Very niche, but a magazine for that. It seems like everyone wants to be hospitable these days or wants to do it in a beautiful way. But, what we might take hospitality to mean is having people over to our beautiful homes and then blowing their minds with great hosting and then posting a picture of it on social media.

Now, it's not that hospitality is not that. There is a part of hospitality that is that and is having people over and preparing a nice home for them and making them feel welcome and serving them a killer meal and possibly posting it on Instagram or whatever. But, biblical hospitality starts from an altogether different place. This is a good working definition of biblical hospitality: biblical hospitality is making space for someone that you don't have to.

Write that down. All those words are chosen really carefully. It's making space for someone that you don't have to. I want to start with the first part of that. Let's start with the first part of that sentence. Making space. What does that mean? Making space for the other. This is actually how the Bible starts. The Bible begins with God. And God – He doesn't have to, by the way – makes space for the other. He doesn't have to do this. But, He makes space. He literally makes space. He makes space for life to take shape. And the apex of that creative endeavor was humanity, and God created a space specifically for humanity called the Garden of Eden. Probably the most hospitable place in the world if it wasn't for that dumb serpent. Like, the most hospitable space that God created for us. And when God created us for this space, He created space for us to do two things. To flourish or to fail. He created this space. He didn't seek to control or to manipulate, but He gave life and freedom for life itself to take shape no matter if life itself was choosing to go their own way. He created this space for us to flourish, all the capacity for us to flourish, but also for us to fail.

He had boundaries and He made boundaries for sure. And good, hospitable spaces always have boundaries. I love how Chance, in that song, says that his grandma showed her love to him with her belt. That was his opening line. "Your smile, your hands, your belt, your money."

Now, if you grew up in a home with spanking, you know exactly what that means, showing love with a belt. The Bible opens with these kind of boundaries. Like, love means boundaries. Love means punishment, even. So, the Bible opens with a hospitable space created by God for the other with good, healthy boundaries. But, we know how this went. We know exactly how this went. We rebelled. We went our own way. We gave God the middle finger and we kept doing it. We do it in a million different ways even today.

Now, after the fall, the hospitality of God takes two different shapes. So, the Bible starts with hospitality; God's hospitality. Making space for someone or the other when He doesn't have to. And He does that. And then, once we fall and we rebel, God's hospitality takes two different forms. The first form God's hospitality takes is one that, even despite all of our best efforts to the contrary, the Earth remains a hospitable place for us to live. The theological term here is called "common grace." That even this earth, even as it stands, still is a hospitable place for us to thrive even though we try to wreck God's planet all the time in all kinds of different ways. Ruin fellowship with each other, ruin His planet every single time. But, Colossians says that Christ Jesus Himself is the cosmic glue that holds the whole universe together.

It says in Colossians 1, "In Him, all things hold together," and he's talking about the cosmos and he's talking about the earth. He's like that atomic glue that physicists don't really know, that cosmic glue. Like, "What is that thing?"

That thing is Jesus Christ. That holds everything together. Again, the theological term for this is "common grace." The second form of hospitality that now takes shape after the fall is shown to us in redemption. It's ultimately shown to us in Christ who, when we were

strangers and enemies of God having rebelled against God's loving rule and went after our own way, God went after us to make a space for us and make a space for us into His family.

So, it says this in Colossians 1: **"Once, you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."**

You were alienated from God. You were cut off from God. You were enemies of God. You were a stranger. And, even worse than a stranger, you were an enemy. But, God went after you and brought you near. That is the other radical form of hospitality.

Ephesians 2:13 says this: **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."**

So, all of us who were really far off from God, God in Christ Jesus brings us near. Okay. That was all theology. Okay? I know a lot of you guys had fun with that. Some of you guys were bored to death. But, that's theology. Here's what it all means. Here's what it all means: hospitality is at the very center of what it means to be a Christian and to think theologically. At the very center of Christianity is hospitality. At the very center of Christianity is God making room for you when you were far off and you were an enemy of God, that you were a stranger and God brought you in. The very center of Christianity is hospitality. The very center of what it means to even start thinking theologically is hospitality.

The heart of belief in the Gospel of Jesus is the affirmation that we were once both strangers and enemies of God and who have now been brought into relationship with God through an act of divine hospitality. You and I were far off and we've been brought near. That's basic to our Christianity. And therefore, the more clearly I see myself, the more clearly that I look in the mirror, that I self-reflect, that I examine my own life and my own heart, the more clearly I see myself as having been once an enemy of God, a stranger to God, as having been once far off from God, the more I see my reason for being hospitable towards other people. I was once far off and God showed me His kindness in bringing me near. So, that's the only impetus, that's the only catalyst that moves me forward to hospitality towards other people.

So, hospitality isn't trendy, it's divine. Hospitality might not be trendy in 10 years from now. But, it's divine. Hospitality is what it means. At the center of our Christian faith is hospitality. Hospitality is a requirement for the follower of Jesus towards those outside the church. And especially, especially for those inside the church. Think of it like this: the worst form of church discipline that we find in the New Testament, the absolute worst form of it is excommunication. Or, basically not being hospitable to a member of the church anymore.

1 Corinthians 5, there was a guy who was sleeping with his step-mother and the church was like – we talked about this years ago, so go back and listen to the sermon. The church was boasting about it and Paul's writing a letter like, "Are you kidding me? Are you crazy? You're boasting about this guy in your church? This is what you must do. You have to excommunicate him. Don't eat with him anymore. Don't be hospitable towards him anymore. Treat him like an outsider. Don't even treat him like a believer anymore. Don't even be hospitable towards him anymore. Don't eat with him anymore."

He says, "Deliver him over to Satan."

Think about that. When Paul the apostle thinks about the worst thing you can do to a member of the church, the worst thing, what's the worst thing you can do to another member of the church? Treat them inhospitably. That's the worst thing you can do. I mean, just think about that when it comes to our little cliques in the church. When we don't let people in there, it's basically a form of church discipline. We're like, "Listen, I'm going to do the worst thing I can do to you in the church. I'm going to treat you inhospitably."

That's how important hospitality is in the life of the church. So, Biblical hospitality is this: making space for someone that you don't have to. But, what kind of space? If we're making space, what kind of space does that entail? That kind of space is free space. And this is what this means. Henry Nouwen, in his book "Reaching Out" – it's a great little book on spirituality, but he has a whole section on hospitality – says this:

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. A free space. Hospitality is not to change

people, but to offer them space where change can take place."

Hospitality is not to change people. You don't bring somebody in your home to go, "I'm going to change you now." That might free you up when you invite even people that are not followers of Jesus over to your house for a meal. You're not like, "How do I do the Sinner's Prayer by the end of this meal? How do I get them to say yes?"

Like, you create a space that change can happen. If it happens, it can happen. We all know what it feels like when a host doesn't create free space for us. It's not a home without boundaries, but it is a place where the stranger can become themselves there. And you know what it's like when you walk in an inhospitable place and as soon as you walk in you know that everything about your life is going to be judged. And because you don't fit into the way they vote, the way they think about whatever, the way that they talk about Christianity, because you don't fit into their thing and they're trying to make you into their thing, it's an inhospitable space.

But, you also know what it's like when someone brings you in with all of your quirky beliefs, because you live in San Francisco. You're so weird. You don't even realize how weird you are. But, when you go into a place and then they receive you and all of your weirdness, all of it, and they let you be you and then there is space to change. That's what a hospitable space is.

This week I asked the staff to share their experience and thoughts of hospitality. Our staff really, deeply cares about hospitality. And a lot of them, most of them, wrote me back and were just like, "This is what I think about hospitality and what we're trying to do and where I've seen it work really well in our church and where I've seen it really suck in our church."

How they responded really has shaped this sermon. But, I wanted to read to you what Julie Barrios wrote back to me, a minister of our spiritual formation. She wrote this. It's not on the screen. Only a part of it is. So, pay attention.

She said, "Hospitality requires good boundaries. This is for the sake of the giver and the receiver. Boundaries create a sense of containment. The difference between a hug and a strangling is different use of the containment capacity."

Only Julie can say that, and it's not weird.

"The physical space contains the experience. There's also hospitality of heart. This is the capacity to allow another human to come as they are. I love this Thomas Merton quote: 'The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves. The resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. Our hearts have to have enough space to allow a person to grow and change and unfold.'"

That's gold. She goes on and says, "For this reason, hospitality cannot exist while the one showing hospitality is attempting to control the other. This is what makes BJM's..." – Because Justice Matters, one of the ministry partners that we support – "...nail day so brilliant. They help people that are usually chaotic and unpredictable opt in and sit still and talk a while and exist in a space of order. It's brilliant. The creative expression of boundaries helps people to choose to live in interactive harmony rather than the prisons of individual selfishness. The opposite of this would be Downton Abbey-ish."

Right? I've never seen it, but I'm sure that you probably have.

"The opposite of this would be the Downton Abbey-ish chokehold of hospitality. This kind of hospitality is actually a structure that set to preserve the comfort and the power of the elite. It limits who is allowed at the table and what they must wear and how they must talk and what topics are taboo and what parts of an actual human person are allowed to exist. This hospitality is a stranglehold."

That's the end of what she says. That's really, really good. And this is what she's getting at. Like, you're able to create and hold a space where people can show up as themselves and as themselves they have the room to grow and become more like Jesus. We hope our community groups are bounded places, but also bounded free spaces. If not, if your experience is that's not the kind of space that your community that you go to is, we are – I promise you – working on that. We're working towards that. That's what we hope our community groups are. We try to create this bounded free space and what we call the second

set of Sunday; our response time. That really long musical outro of our sermon? If you've ever been around for a while, we do this long set of music at the end of the sermon. And the reason why, it's bounded free space. You are free to sit or kneel or stand or sing or pray by yourself or pray with a member of a prayer team or receive communion or pick up your child and bring them in here to worship or just leave.

It's this free space. And what we've seen in this space is that people are changed by the power of God. They're free to go, "I'm free to respond to God?"

And then they begin to move towards God. This is the space that we want to create in our church. Now, I read at the beginning there's that verse in Matthew that connects inhospitability – I don't know if that's a word, but I think it is. It connects being inhospitable to Hell. You see how those that were not hospitable go to Hell. Did you guys catch that? I snuck that in there. Some of you guys are like, "Whoa. Why did he read that?"

Because it's in the Bible and Jesus said it. That's why I read it. It's traditionally called the parable of the sheep and the goats. The sheep and the goats. But, I don't think it's a parable. I think it's what's going to happen when Jesus returns. He doesn't say, "It's going to be like this," He says, "It is this."

He says that when the second coming of the Son of Man happens, this is what will happen. There's going to be a dividing of the sheep and the goats. And the sheep go to the right and the goats go to the left. And the ones to the right, He says this: "Come, you who are blessed by the Father, and take your inheritance. The Kingdom of God is prepared for you since the creation of the world."

He says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."

And they will answer Him like, "Whoa. What do you mean? When did we see you naked? When did we see you poor? When did we see you hungry? When did we do that? I don't even remember seeing you ever."

And He will say, "I tell you truly, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Are you kidding me? And then he turns to the people on the left and they're like, "Uh oh." And He said, "Okay, depart from me, you wicked and cursed people to eternal punishment. Because, when I was hungry..."

And He goes through the whole list again. You didn't give me anything to eat, you didn't give me anything to drink, you never invited me in as a stranger. And they will say the same thing, "Wait, wait, wait. Time out. We never have seen you. When have we seen you?"

And Jesus says, "Truly, I tell you, what you did not do for the least one of these you did not do for me."

Wow. There is something so fundamental to hospitality that's buried in here that's easy to overlook, and you need to see it. It's this: this whole passage hinges on seeing. The whole passage hinges on seeing. Both the righteous and the wicked say, "When did we see you? Jesus, when did we see you hungry and thirsty and alone and naked and imprisoned? When did we see you?"

And the people who were not hospitable at all did not excuse themselves. They didn't say, "Whoa, whoa. Time out. You know, I didn't really find that to be very... I know I didn't help people who were other than me. I know I didn't help the poor and the naked and the imprisoned. I know I didn't give people something to drink or something to eat. I know that. But, I didn't really have the resources to do that."

They didn't say that. They didn't say, "Well, I found that it's too demanding. That was way too demanding or way too demeaning. I couldn't demean myself to do that."

They didn't cry out saying, "It was too hard. I didn't have enough time. The resources I had were lacking."

They did not say, "Give me a second chance."

All they said was this: "When did we see you hungry? When did we ever see you do that?"

So, it must be assertive that hospitality can only start with seeing other people. Hospitality can only start by seeing other human people. The righteous people saw other humans. They saw their need. The unrighteous didn't see them at all. They weren't seeing. So, hospitality has to do with seeing the stranger. It has to do with seeing the poor or seeing the oppressed or seeing the outsider or seeing the lost or seeing the broken or seeing another person. The righteous saw the brokenness and the hurt and they were doing the small things. Like, notice Jesus didn't say, "When I was sick, you healed me. When I was in prison, you got me out of prison."

No. He said, "When I was sick, you cared for me. When I was in prison, you visited me."

He's not asking us to change the world. He's like, "Just do the small things like feed someone. Just feed someone."

And then it could just be like this one thing. And that little thing, Jesus said, "When you do these small little – they're not hard to do – ministries. When you're doing them, you're seeing the other person and in that you're serving me."

And when we don't, we're probably looking for the big opportunities. We're going, "If I saw you, Jesus, I would have done something. I would have given my whole bank account if I saw you. I'm looking for that big thing that I can contribute to. Like the big thing like, 'Oh, there's Jesus. I know that's Him.'"

No, no. It's found in the things that you're not seeing. There's a very popular phrase that's gone around recently on social media and otherwise. It's "stay woke," if you've ever seen that statement somewhere. And I think that's what Jesus is saying here. This is what Jesus is saying. I think this is exactly what Jesus is saying here. Your eyes are actually open to other people. That you're truly woke to people's situations and their problems and their hurts and that you're going after them to bring them in.

Not to bring too much hip-hop into today, but Kendrick Lamar has a song on his album, "To Pimp a Butterfly," called "How Much a Dollar Cost?" It's basically this story of Jesus right here – this story of sheep and goats – made into his song. Literally, that's all it is. It's about him, Kendrick Lamar, when he was in Cape Town, South Africa, and he runs into a panhandler who wants a dollar. Kendrick starts to judge him. Like, "I know exactly what you're going to spend that dollar on."

And we know that in San Francisco. "I know exactly what you're going to spend that dollar on. There's no way I'm giving you a dollar. You have to go out and work like I had to work to get a dollar."

And he doesn't want to give this man a dollar because he knows what he's going to do with it even though to Kendrick, a dollar is nothing. He's rich. A dollar is nothing to him. But, to this homeless man, a dollar is everything to him. And then, at the end of the song, the homeless man turns to Kendrick and says this. This is the lyric in the end of the song.

"Know the truth, it'll set you free. You're looking at the Messiah, the Son of Jehovah, the Higher Power, the choir that spoke the word, the Holy Spirit,  
The nerve of Nazareth, and I'll tell you just how much a dollar cost.  
The price of having a spot in Heaven. 'Imburse your loss, I am God.'"

And in that moment he realizes, "I just didn't give a dollar to God and I've lost my place in Heaven because I didn't serve the least of these."

Like, that's what the song is about. And it's that point that Kendrick realizes that this dollar could have got him – how much a dollar cost? This dollar, which is nothing to him. Like, some of you guys, opening your house is nothing to you. But, you won't do it. Opening your life is nothing to you, but you won't do it. And this is the point of the story, and it's supposed to weigh on you heavy. It's supposed to scare you to death. Like, that cost me nothing, but I could've inherited eternal life.

This is what He's saying. By "Him," I mean Jesus. This is what Jesus is saying. How do we see ourselves in other people? It's the beginning of hospitality. Let me give you a very silly analogy. A very silly one. But, I think as a church we're kind of bad at this. So, I'll kind of point it at us. This actually could be, also, a symptom of a deeper problem.



We have in our church, on Sundays especially, a seat-saving culture in our church. Okay? We have a seat-saving culture. No one look around right now. Don't do this. Don't start judging people next to you. Okay? So, stop. Okay? This is a free space right here. Free space. We have a seat-saving culture in our church. And it started all the way back six years ago when we started meeting in the Swedish-American Home. Very small venue. People started pouring in. There weren't enough seats. People would save seats. And then tons of people would get turned away every Sunday. People would show up and we're like, "Sorry, we're out of room," and they'd get turned away, sometimes by the dozens they'd get turned away.

So, there was this seat-saving culture that started in our church. And I know that my wife is notoriously late to everything, and I'm always saving a seat for her. So, saving a seat for my wife gives me anxiety. So, I know what you feel like if you're the early person who's saving seats, okay? When you save a seat for someone, think of it like this, okay? We're talking about how you see people. When you save a seat for someone, how do you see people that are not who you've saved the seat for? How do you see them? They walk up and you look at them and all you see them is as a threat to your seat. That's it. So, you look at them and you don't even want to make eye contact. You're on your phone like, "Don't look at me. Don't look at me. Don't look at me."

And then they go, "Is that..."

"Yes. These five rows are for my friends. You're not my friend. These are for my friends."

Okay? So, this happens. Now, if you did that today and you're like, "Oh my gosh. Carpets. Can we just get to the carpets now? I need to repent. Like, right now."

We've all done it. Almost every single person in here has done it. I've done it before. So, this is exactly how we see people. Like, think about when we're walking past panhandlers on the street. We keep our head down, we look at our phone, we don't even give them a look in the eyes. Because we're like, "You're a nuisance to me."

When we walk past a homeless encampment, how do we see them? We see them as a threat. We might grab our stuff a little tighter, walk a little faster, head down, don't make eye contact. We don't want them to engage. I don't want to engage. We see them as a threat. This is what Jesus' parable's about. How do we see other people? How do we see them? Do we see them as humans with real needs far off from God like we were? Do we see them like that? How do you see people when they come over to your house for CG? How do you see people when you ride next to them on Muni? I mean, let me bring it back to where we started. Do we see people who were once like us afar from God but who need to be brought near by God's loving hospitality? Like, how do we see people?

Do you see why God says, "If you don't have my character, you don't have any part in my inheritance. Because, the kind of character that shapes a person who is my follower is the kind of person who is actually woke to the realities of their environment. And they see the poor and the naked and the lost. They see these people. They actually see them."

We need to start looking at people. Hospitality starts with us actually seeing the other person. Seeing them and seeing them in all of their flaws with all of their, even sometimes, quirky theology. We see them as human beings, people, and then we make space for them. Free space.

Now, here's some practical ways of moving toward hospitality as a community. Practical ways. I'll start with saying what we've said since we started the church. We've never really asked you to invite people to church on Sunday morning ever. The only time we've ever asked you to invite someone to church was Easter. But, you've never heard us say, "Bring someone to church."

We've always said this since the beginning, "Invite someone over to your house before you invite them to church. Let them see you. If what they see in your house does not match what happens in this house, then I want them to call it out. They should be able to see it."

Invite them over to your house. So, I want to encourage you. Keep your house open for strangers. Think about people. There might be people that you bump into. Or take them out if your house is like, "I have 38 roommates and the schedule is crazy."

Take them out somewhere, then, or something like that. Be with other people that are not like you, that are strangers. Consider doing that. Have people over to your home if you can. Practice hospitality. You might not be good at holding a space where people can be themselves. But, that's what practice means. You're practicing it. So, you might have someone over and it's awkward, it's weird, you burned the dinner or whatever. And then you start talking too much. Whatever. Whatever happens, and it's just a train wreck. Well, go do it again and practice it and get better at holding that space. Do that.

Also, when you do start to know people and have created space for relationships, start to invite your colleagues or your friends into your spiritual home, into this church. Like, bring them to community group or bring them to church on a Sunday or bring them to one of the lectures that we have that are open to the public. Bring them in those spaces as well. The other thing is: try to gather with other Christians informally all the time. Try to do that. That's the power of social media and texts or whatever. You can amass a group of people really quickly, typically. Try to do that. Eat together a lot. There are things that happen around a table that can never be accomplished in any other way.

There's a lot of people that are like, "Meals?"

I don't know. Stephanie Dorr, our events coordinator, when she emailed me she shared with me a quote from Eugene Peterson. She said, "It's striking how much of Jesus' life is told in settings defined by meals."

So, if you read especially the Gospel of Luke, the whole thing is just like Jesus at dinner tables. The whole book. Another thing you could do is host a community group in your home. Like, consider hosting a group in your home.

Lastly, this is probably the most important one. Pray and truly consider working in our kids' department. For real. Like, consider being not just a volunteer, but like a Sunday school teacher. Consider that. A couple weeks ago, Marissa, our Kid's Director, we were going around and she was emotional, she was really moved even to almost tears when she said this. She said, "We have almost 100 kids in our kids' ministry. Sometimes more. And we are having so many kids and we have some amazing volunteers. But, the turnover is rapid. We can't get enough people to fill the spots because we have such a growing kids' ministry that we might have to turn kids away."

And I'm like, "Okay, so, if we turn kids away, we're just not a church anymore. We just stop. We just quit."

Like, literally Jesus said that. "Don't turn kids away."

Like, we get to heaven and Jesus is like, "Umm, why'd you turn kids away?"

And we're like, "We didn't have enough room."

He goes, "But, I literally said not to do that. I literally..."

Like, we might be able to get away with turning adults away, but you cannot get away with turning kids away. You just can't.

"I said that. I specifically said that. It's in the Bible. It's there."

So, we can't do that. We can't get there. So, pray, consider. Seriously pray about it and pray for God to call other people.

Here's some things to stop doing. This one's going to sting. Stop saving seats or stop saving them so meanly. Just stop being mean about it, okay? Be nice. Like, I don't know. I don't know how you're nice. Just do your version of nice. Or, save an extra one for the stranger. Save one extra and go, "Oh, I'm saving seats but I have an extra one right here."

Okay. And if you sit by your community group, that's great. But, just be aware there's other people around you. I know that you guys are a community group and you guys do everything together and you guys are best friends and you do retreats. And we love that. But, you come in here and it feels kind of like a clique. It just does. Like, "We're friends and we Tahoe together and we don't have time for anyone else."

Awesome that you do that. Please keep doing that. That's amazing. But, bring other people in to that. Okay? Also, stop doing this. Stop being creepy during the four-minute meet and greet. Stop being creepy. You know who you are. Four minutes. Guys, take four minutes to say hi to one another. And then you're like, "Oh, I've got to go to the bathroom. I've got to leave. I've got to check my email. I've got to get out my phone."

This is a real time that traditionally is called "pass the peace" and it means this: it means when you turn to someone during that time and warmly shake their hand – if you don't have a cold. If you have a cold, just say, "I have a cold. Here you go."

Don't touch anyone if you have a cold. Okay? But, if you warmly shake someone's hand, you're saying this, "I was a stranger, but God brought me in and now I'm not a stranger. And I don't have to worship around strangers. I can worship around family. Hi, I worship around family. I don't worship around strangers."

Okay? So, four minutes is that. Now, I know that four minutes is an extended period of time. You can know how to work a room. Just say hi to 50 people. I don't care. Be nice, though, and turn to people and say hi.

So, I want to close with this. I want to close with that Hebrews verse. This is so fun.

Hebrews 13:2: **"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."**

That's in our Bible, guys. That is so cool. This is what happened with the sheeps – the sheeps. Why do I keep saying that?

This is what keeps happening to the sheep. Right? On Jesus' right, this is exactly what happened to them. They were like shocked. They're like, "Jesus, we got in? Wait, wait, wait. Time out. When did we see you as a stranger? This is so surprising. We had no way that we were entertaining Jesus. This is crazy. You're saying that that one time where I gave that person that was hungry food, that was you the whole time? I had no idea that was you."

Jesus is like, "That was me."

And they were surprised. They were blown away. This is the essence of what it's talking about. This actually has roots in the Old Testament when Abraham entertained three guests and he ended up entertaining God Himself and His angels. Some people even think it was Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Without even knowing it. There's actually a history of this throughout the Bible. Like, you're entertaining people and you get surprised by who you're entertaining. You're like, "Wait, who are you? What just happened?"

This is how Nouwen puts it in his book:

"Old and New Testament stories not only show how serious our obligation is to welcome the stranger in our home, but they also tell us that guests are carrying precious gifts with them which they are eager to reveal to a receptive host."

When you start hosting the other, you are given, oftentimes, the greatest gift that they're wanting to give you. This is what he's saying: when hospitality is done right, it's sacramental. It's like communion. Like, there's a holy event. It's like Sunday candy. It's like there's this holy event that happens during hospitality that becomes, "I'm entertaining angels. I'm entertaining God. Or, there is something way beyond just hosting someone right now. There is a sacrament going on."

This last week, we were doing the race intensive and I was at the Latino and Native American night and we were looking through experiences of our family of origin and I was so moved by thinking about my Nina and Nino, my godparents. As a child, my aunt and my uncle became my godparents. So, every time I went and visited them, they would take me in, care for me really well and hospitably, pray for me and then take me to their Catholic church. And they made a vow when they became my godparents – my Nina and Nino is what I called them – that they would make sure that it was their obligation that one day I follow Jesus. That was it. That was what they were vowing to. Like, "One day when you choose that I'm your godparent, I want you to follow Jesus."

So, I remember when I first called them and told them that I was going to a church and I became a Christian and I was going to be on staff at a church, and they said, "Our first

prayer was that it was our church. But, you're following Jesus and we cannot be more proud."

And I'd think about you never know who is coming into your home and what they're going to be. You never know what your prayers are going to do to someone when you invite them into your place and when you invite them in and when you just hold a space with boundaries that you're caring for them and loving them and that they know that you follow Jesus and that you pray before a meal and they know that you love Christ. I mean, you'd never know who you're going to entertain. You never know who you're going to bring in.

So, our hope, my prayer as a church, this is something that we practice and we get really, really good at as a church.

Let's pray.

God, thank You that You're doing this in our church. I thank You that ways that we have fallen short, we confess those to You. We confess that, Lord, the way that we walk through the city sometimes is inhospitable. The way that we act and react even in this church gathering is inhospitable and we confess that to You. We thank You that there is room for repentance, there is room to change, there is room to be changed by You, there's room to say, "I'm going to start picking up the small things and start moving in small ways towards hospitality in this city and in this church."

So, God, I pray now that as we have this space that we would respond to You. It might look like praying for someone in this gathering, it might look just like worshiping or turning to You and saying, "Thank You for making this space for me," and giving You gratitude. Or, it might not even be that emotional at all. It might just be this time where we, in all sobriety, just sing and thank You, God, for Your hospitality toward us.

Whatever it looks like, God, we thank You that You've made room for us in Your family. In Jesus' name, amen.