

The Ripple Effect

[Text - Matthew 10:40-42; 1:1-6]

Pastor Dave Shackle

July 2, 2017

As Jesus sends his followers into the towns and villages of Judea, he tells them “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me.”

According to Jesus, when people welcome his followers into their homes and communities, not only are they *extending* hospitality; they’re also opening themselves to *experience* the Divine hospitality and wholeness, compassion and peace which Jesus himself embodies. This same principle holds true for you and me today: that whenever we practice genuine hospitality, the mutual blessings that result are multiplied magnificently!

Those of us who participate in our Hunger Meals, or volunteer at the International Newcomers’ Academy, know exactly how this works. Not only do the people who receive our gifts of food and hospitality, time, and attention benefit from our efforts, but we ourselves are tremendously blessed! We get to know people we would otherwise not. Sometimes, they share with us their hopes and dreams, their struggles and concerns, their Life-stories and themselves. They remind us of how devastating it can be to lose one’s job or home; or how demoralizing it is when political leaders demonize a person’s native country or religion. They also remind us of how fortunate you and I truly are!

Hospitality has always been a central part of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith practices. The call to “welcome the stranger” is echoed throughout our shared Scriptures, and is considered THE authentic measure of our faithfulness to Holy One. Back in Jesus’ day, there were no Middle-Eastern Best Western Hotels. So when weary travelers would arrive in a town in the evening, they would simply sit by the community well and wait. It was then incumbent

upon the townspeople to feed and house those travelers for the night. They were usually unknown to the community. Sometimes they were foreigners, who wore different clothing, spoke different languages, and perhaps even worshiped different gods! But those factors weren't important. What was important, was that people of faith put their faith into action. Of course today, opening ones home to a total stranger would seem either extremely courageous and caring, or downright dangerous and dumb! So even though the human need for hospitality remains a constant, the suspicious fear of the stranger is an ever-increasing stumbling-block - which is truly unfortunate.

As Pastor of this congregation, one of my responsibilities - and privileges - is to welcome those strangers who call or stop-by the church seeking help. In your name and in the name of Christ, I try to assist them in ways that are compassionate, appropriate *and* discerning. There are *some* who seek to take advantage of our hospitality - those who concoct elaborate [yet strangely similar] stories about needing gas money so they can go see a critically ill out-of-state relative, before it's too late. Or a horribly cruel landlord who's ready to toss them and their 12 children out into the streets *tonight*, if they don't pay their rent [or at least a couple hundred dollars of it]. I've heard stories about all kinds of convoluted, catastrophic Life-situations, that makes the Plague look like a picnic! Sometimes it's hard to decide whether I should give them help, or give them an Oscar for best actor in a Dramatic Performance! Nonetheless, there are two basic things I try to keep in mind: First of all, most of these people really do need help - even those who aren't being completely honest. Secondly, it's better to err on the side of *grace*, than to give-in to jaded skepticism.

The message of Jesus is quite clear: you and I are to joyfully *give*, and graciously *receive*, hospitality; and our interaction those we encounter - particularly the outsider and stranger - is to be one of

kindness and compassion, rather than suspicion and fear. When I remember that each person I meet truly is a beloved offspring of our One Divine Source, then my response will be gracious; even if it's to say, "I'm sorry, but I can't help you with that." Most of the time, I *can* help - in large part because of your generous donations to our Pastor's Fund. And sometimes, those who receive our help say that they'll try to "pay it back" when they get back on their feet. I tell them I really appreciate that; but then I ask them, instead, to "pay it forward" - that when the very next opportunity arises for them to do something helpful for someone else - no matter how small the favor - they go ahead and do it. Sometimes, there's this look of recognition, as they realize, "Yeah, that's something I *can* do!" And I remain optimistic, that those who truly want to pay us back, actually do find a way to "pay it forward".

Jesus says, "Whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones...will not lose their reward." In other words, even the smallest gesture of compassion or hospitality makes a positive imprint on the Cosmic Canvas of Life. And when the response to an act of kindness, is to carry that kindness forward, then the ripple effect of those blessings multiplies *exponentially!* Therefore, I'd like us to try a Cosmological Experiment this week: that each one of us make a conscious and concerted effort to do at least *one* special thing for someone we might normally overlook or pass-by. It doesn't have to be anything big, just something to make us mindful of the every-day opportunities we have to offer Divine grace and hospitality to others. As we do this, I believe that our week will go better for us - for those around us - and even for those unknown to us, who will reap the benefits of that expanding, positive energy. I also believe that the Divine Source of *all* positive energy, compassion, and hospitality, will be pleased as well!