

Hospitality in the Old Testament

Adult Formation - October 22-23, 2005

Presider:

"Today we have the first of three talks on hospitality in the Bible.
[Name] will tell us about eucharistic hospitality in the New Testament."

What kind of planet are we on? Is this world our home where God welcomes us as sons and daughters? Or are we always destined to feel like strangers in a strange land?

The Old Testament gives us a very clear answer to this question. It begins with the story of God creating this world as a home for us, a place of his unending hospitality to us. At the end of each day of creation, we hear the words: "And God saw that it was good." When God creates human beings, we hear: "And God saw that it was very good." We hear: "In his own image he created them; male and female he created them." Clearly, God considers us his own—his sons and daughters—meant to feel at home with him in this beautiful world of ours.

Hospitality—being at home in this world that God has made for us—is our natural state, our birthright. The name for this in the book of Genesis is the Garden of Eden. There we are perfectly at home as sons and daughters with God our Father. Now, we all know the story of the Fall—how Adam and Eve turned away from this paradise. But we forget the other side of the story—God's side. God has never disowned us from our natural birthright. In God's eyes, we are still sons and daughters. In other words, in God's eyes, the Garden of Eden has never ended. God is always ready to welcome us, to bring us home, to offer us hospitality. We're the ones who tend to run away.

The Old Testament is one very long story—about 4 times as long as the New Testament story. I started by talking about the spirit of hospitality when God created the world and the Garden of Eden. Since I can't tell all the smaller stories that make up the bigger story, let me touch on just two brief ones.

First, Abraham and Sarah. They were nomads in an out-of-the-way place called Ur of the Chaldees. They had no home to call their own—no land that was theirs to enjoy. God sent them out in search of the Promised Land, where their descendants would be as numerous as the stars. "Promised Land" is just another name for the Garden of Eden. It's not just a place. It's a relationship—the loving relationship of a Father with his sons and daughters. When you have that relationship, you always feel welcome no matter where you go. You're always at home. Hospitality is everywhere.

Or a second quick story: Moses and the Exodus. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Great hospitality, don't you think? Well, God told Moses to set his people free. It was time for Exodus! "Exodus" is about hospitality, just as the Promised Land and the Garden of Eden are. God's home is our home. No more slavery. God is always ready to welcome us home.

No matter where we turn in the Old Testament—God creating the world, Adam and Eve in the Garden, Abraham and Sarah in search of the Promised Land, Moses leading the Exodus—what we see is a God who always welcomes us back home, calls us his own, offers us a love that means hospitality for us forever.