Jesus and the Hospitality of God Luke 14:12-24

1 of 4 in *Hospitality: Making Space for the Stranger* Sept. 20, 2026

I'd like to begin this morning by discussing a biblical word that today's church really needs to recover. That word is *hospitality*. We find it throughout the Bible, like in Romans 12:13, which says:

> Always be eager to practice hospitality. [1]

That's a pretty strong exhortation, isn't it? Not, "Practice hospitality when it's convenient," or "if you're naturally outgoing," or "if you're especially good at entertaining."

Always be eager to practice hospitality.

But what exactly does the Bible mean by hospitality?

When I teach on this subject, I sometimes ask people to call out the words or phrases that come to mind when they hear the word *hospitality*. Our answers often reveal the cultural baggage the word has accumulated.

We may think of the hospitality industry—hotels and restaurants. We may think of having close friends over for dinner, or being gifted at cooking, or planning social gatherings.

None of those things are bad. But they can leave us with an understanding of hospitality that has very little to do with how the Bible understands the practice—and the power it has to shape people, relationships, and communities. This is why renowned Christian author Henri Nouwen once wrote:

> If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality. It can offer a new dimension to our understanding of a healing relationship and the formation of a re-creative community in a world so visibly suffering from alienation and estrangement. [2]

If we want to understand biblical hospitality, it's essential to remember one very important word: *stranger*. Everybody say, "Stranger."

The kind of hospitality scripture calls us to "always be eager to practice" is fundamentally about welcoming the stranger. Accordingly, I've found the following definition helpful:

> **Biblical hospitality is the attitude and practice of welcoming strangers by providing an environment in which they are free to become accepted, included, and loved.**

A "stranger" isn't necessarily someone we've never seen before. A stranger is someone who is outside our familiar circle.

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[1] Romans 12:13

[2] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, p. 66.

It might be someone from a different culture, generation, or economic circumstance. Someone with exceptionalities or social challenges. Or simply someone who is new—new to your church, neighbourhood, workplace, or school—someone who hasn't yet found their place within the circle.

This is where biblical hospitality gets to the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. The story of the Bible is, in large part, the story of a God who makes room for people who are outside. In Jesus, God welcomes us when we are strangers to him, brings us near, and gives us a place in his family. And then, he calls us as his family to extend that same welcome to others.

Did you know that biblical hospitality is one of Cornerstone's core values? We express it this way:

> **CORNERSTONE CORE VALUE – BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY**
> **We welcome the stranger into our church, homes, hearts and lives as God has welcomed us in Christ.**

That's not simply a nice ideal we aspire to. It's part of who we believe God has called us to be and become as a church. Because throughout Scripture, it is very clear that **God has a heart for the stranger.**

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly reminds Israel: *You were once strangers.*

They knew what it was like to be outsiders. For generations, they had lived as foreigners in Egypt and eventually became enslaved under Pharaoh. They knew what it was like to be vulnerable and dependent upon someone else's mercy.

And so, after God rescued them and brought them into a place they could call home, he told them: *Remember where you came from. You were once strangers and slaves in Egypt. Now treat the stranger as I have treated you.* [3]

In other words, their hospitality toward the stranger was meant to flow from the hospitality they had first received from God. They were to make space for others because God had made space for them.

But then something even more remarkable happens. In Jesus, the God who makes space for the stranger himself becomes the stranger who enters our world. And Jesus shows us what the hospitality of God looks like in human flesh. As we encounter Jesus, we discover not only what God's welcome looks like, but what that welcome calls us to become.

That's what we're going to explore today as we begin a new series called *Hospitality: Making Space for the Stranger*. On the basis of our text in Luke 14, we're going to consider **three ways that Jesus reveals the hospitality of God—**and what that means for us as his people.

First, we see that:

1. Before we welcome others, God welcomes us.

[3] See Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34

In our passage, Jesus is a guest at a dinner party at the house of a prominent religious official—a Pharisee. People are watching Jesus carefully as he turns to his host and says:

> "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid."[4]

Now, Jesus isn't saying you shouldn't have family and friends over for dinner. He's exposing something deeper.

We can create relationships shaped by the expectation of return: *I invite you; you invite me. I help you; you help me. I welcome you; you welcome me.*

Such relationships don't take you beyond yourself and what you get out of them.

But what happens when you welcome people who may not—or cannot—welcome you back? When you give without expecting anything in return? When you make space for people from whom, at least on the surface, you have nothing to gain?

That's where we begin to see what the hospitality of God looks like. Jesus continues:

> "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." [5]

Jesus then goes on to tell a parable about a banquet. A parable is a story that reframes our everyday expectations to give us a peek into what the kingdom of God looks like when it breaks into our world.

> "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many." At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' [6]

The question of who gets invited to our tables suddenly opens into something much grander: a picture of *God's* table—a great banquet— a feast prepared, an invitation extended, a host ready to welcome. The host in the parable represents God's own hospitality.

And this is where we need to begin our understanding of biblical hospitality: **God is the Host.** The banquet belongs to God. The food belongs to God. The invitation comes from God. The table belongs to God. And we are his guests.

Before we talk about *our* hospitality, we need to understand *God's* hospitality. Before we become hosts, we have been guests. Before we make room for someone else, God has made room for us.

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[4] Luke 14:12 (NIV)
[5] Luke 14:13-14 (NIV)
[6] Luke 14:16 (NIV)

Indeed, Ephesians 2 says that we were once "foreigners and strangers," but through the cross of Christ we have been brought near, becoming members of God's own household. [7]

Think about the significance of that. We aren't insiders who have generously decided to let some outsiders in. *We ourselves were once outsiders who have been welcomed in.* We didn't earn our place at God's table. In Jesus, God made room for us. He brought us near. He welcomed us.

And this changes the posture of Christian hospitality. We don't stand above the stranger saying, "Look how generous I am to let you in." We stand beside the stranger and say, "We're both here because in Jesus, God made room for us."

That's grace. And that's why the ministry of Jesus was so revolutionary. In the chapter right after the chapter we're studying today, Luke tells us that tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus, and the religious people complained:

> "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." [8]

That was meant to be an accusation. But it's actually one of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.

That's the Jesus we follow—the one whose life and death embody the very hospitality of God. And if Jesus is forming us into his likeness as his people, then hospitality isn't just some peripheral or optional Christian virtue. It's an essential part of what it means to become like Jesus—to be his disciples.

Secondly, in our text we see that:

2. Jesus turns guests into hosts.

Returning to Jesus' story, the invitations have gone out, the banquet is prepared, and yet the invited guests begin making excuses: *I just bought a field. I just bought some oxen. I just got married.*

One by one, they decline the host's invitation. These are the expected guests—the people who should have been at the table. Yet when the invitation comes, they're too preoccupied with their lives, possessions, relationships and plans. So, the host tells his servant:

> "'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'
>
> "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'"
>
> "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'" [9]

[7] See Ephesians 2:19-21
[8] Luke 15:2b (NIV)
[9] Luke 14:21b (NIV)

Notice what happens. The invitation keeps moving outward. The guest list keeps expanding. Those who were never among the expected guests are welcomed in.

This is one of the great themes of Luke's Gospel. The kingdom of God does not operate according to the usual boundaries of status, belonging, or social respectability.

The poor, the outsider, the stranger, the person who cannot repay— they are not afterthoughts in God's kingdom. They are welcomed guests.

And there's an even bigger movement here that Jesus' first hearers would eventually come to recognize. The expected guests are Israel—the people who had received God's promises and the invitation to his kingdom. But when some of them refuse that invitation, the welcome moves outward to those regarded as outsiders. In the larger story of the gospel, that includes the Gentiles—people once "far away" who, through Jesus, are brought near and welcomed into God's family. [10]

The table gets bigger. The invitation goes farther. God's welcome keeps moving outward.

And this brings us back to Jesus' earlier words to his dinner host. [11]

Don't simply invite people who can invite you back. Don't let your table become a closed circle. *Make room for people who aren't already part of your circle.*

It's easy to welcome people who are familiar to us, who make us comfortable, who fit naturally into our lives. But Jesus invites us to notice the person we would not naturally choose—the person who is different from us, who doesn't know how things work, who might change the dynamic of the group.

This is where one of our four Guiding Priorities—Building Bridges Across Difference—comes into focus.

We don't build bridges simply by appreciating diversity from a distance. We build them by moving toward people who are different from us—by listening, sharing a meal, becoming curious, and making room in spite of the fact that doing so can feel messy and awkward at times.

When we do, something begins to happen. The stranger becomes a neighbour. The neighbour becomes a friend. And the boundaries that once seemed so important begin to lose their power.

This is the kind of community Jesus creates: *not uniformity, but unity-in-diversity—people who would never have naturally chosen one another finding themselves together at the same table.*

And now we begin to see why Jesus turns guests into hosts.

The people who receive hospitality aren't simply objects of someone else's generosity. They are welcomed to the banquet. They become guests at the table. And in the larger story of scripture, guests become hosts.

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[10] Ephesians 2:11-13
[11] Luke 14:12-14

Those who have received welcome learn to extend welcome. Those who have been brought near learn to make room for others. Those who have been welcomed into God's household become people entrusted with the welcome of God.

As members of God's household, we're not simply guests who have been welcomed in. *We're entrusted with the welcome.* We welcome as Jesus would welcome if he were standing at the door himself. In this way, Jesus turns guests into hosts.

We don't welcome because we're the good people who have something others don't. We welcome because we've been welcomed.

We don't make room because we're more generous than others. We make room because Jesus made room for us.

We don't cross boundaries because we're naturally courageous. We cross boundaries because Jesus crossed the ultimate boundary to bring us near.

The third way that Jesus reveals the hospitality of God is by making it clear that:

3. There is still room.

This is where the movement of the whole passage takes us. We've been welcomed by God, Jesus turns guests into hosts, and now those hosts are sent out because there is still room at the table.

Look again at the parable:

> "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'
>
> "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. [12]

There is still room.

That is a beautiful picture of the heart of God. His welcome keeps moving outward toward people who may never have imagined that they were invited.

And notice what the servant is told to do: *Go out.*

Don't wait for people to find their way in. Go where people are. Notice them. Invite them.

That connects with one of our Guiding Priorities— *Joining God in the Neighbourhood*. We believe God is already at work around us—in our neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools, coffee shops and community centres, families and friendships.

[12] Luke 14:22-23 (NIV)

Following Jesus means becoming attentive to the places we inhabit and people around us, asking, "Jesus, who are you inviting me to notice? Who are you asking me to move toward?"

But hospitality also matters when we gather *here*.

Every Sunday, people walk through these doors carrying stories we know nothing about. Some are brand new. Some have been coming for months and still don't know anyone. Some are wondering whether they belong.

And if Cornerstone is your home church, then you're not simply someone who attends this church. **You're a host.**

Not just the pastors or staff. Not just the welcome team. *All of us.*

Please repeat after me: "I am a host."

Therefore, when you come here on a Sunday—or to a workshop or to an Open Table Thursday dinner or to a community outreach or a rec program— don't just look for the people you already know. Look around. Who is *outside* your circle? Who *haven't* you met? Who might be wondering whether they belong?

Here's a simple practice: **one new name a week.** Once a week, introduce yourself to someone you don't know—whether they're new to Cornerstone or not so new. Learn their name. Ask a question. Sit beside them. Make one new connection—one new name a week—that's the challenge.

Imagine if all of us did that. Our circles would widen, and people would experience the welcome of Jesus not just in what we say, but in the way we make room for one another, and for others—for the stranger.

This is at the heart of our 10-year vision, *Making Space for Belonging*: becoming a place where people can walk through these doors and discover, "There's room for me here."

And that is really the invitation Jesus is extending in this parable. He is making room for people who would never have assumed there was a place for them. That's why they need to be compelled—because they have never imagined there could really be room for them.

"Me? Are you sure you mean me?"

"Yes. Come. There's room."

How many people around us live with that question: *Is there really room for someone like me?* Someone with their background, their story, their struggles, their culture, their age, their abilities, their doubts or their failures.

And Jesus says, "Come."

Not because you have everything together. Not because you can repay the invitation. But because the ultimate Host has invited you, and *there is still room.*

And if that is the welcome we have received, then the question for us becomes: **Who is missing from my table?**

Who is missing from my friendships, my home, my small group, my neighbourhood, my church life?

Maybe it's someone new to the country. Someone from another generation or culture. Someone whose life is complicated. Someone you wouldn't normally befriend. Someone who has little to offer you in return, perhaps—but then again, maybe they have far more to offer you than you realize.

As followers of Jesus, we know what it is to be welcomed. We were strangers, and Jesus brought us near. We were outside, and Jesus opened the door. We didn't earn our place at his table. But Jesus made a place for us through his life, death and resurrection.

Jesus has made room for us—and *there is still room!*

So, let's be people who extend his hospitable welcome to others. When we do, the stranger can become a neighbour, and the neighbour a friend. And together, at the table of Jesus, strangers discover that they are part of the household of God.

Let's pray…