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Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge
Hospitality
Matthew 22-28

Does anybody know what today is? Yes, it's week four of the 90 Day Challenge! If you're visiting I want to let you know that we've been reading through the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all 89 chapters of them, one chapter a day. Every day we read a chapter and ask two questions, "What did I learn about Jesus?" and "What did I learn about being a disciple-maker?"

So here's where we've been. As we visit the 90 Day Challenge on Sundays we've been looking closer at that second question, how Jesus makes disciples. On week one we started off with looking at being Intentional, living lives of purpose and purposefully going to a deeper place with ourselves and with others. The next week Pastor Mark got vulnerable and talked about being Relational, sharing our lives with each other. He gave us that convicting line, "You're not as relational as you think you are." This last week we looked at how Jesus wants to make disciples who are Unflappable, just as Jesus is unflappable. What an encouragement that Jesus doesn't give up on us.

This week, we're going to look at how Jesus wants to make disciples who are Hospitable. By the way, I don't know if you knew this but I understand there's some big game going on today. Okay, I know full well the game is today. Actually, I collected some facts about the Super Bowl. Did you know that on average, each person watching the Super Bowl consumes 1,200 calories? Personally, I think that's probably a bit low. I heard that more calories are consumed on this day than any other day of the year. About 4 million pounds of pretzels, 2.5 million pounds of nuts, 11 million pounds of chips and 4,000 tons of popcorn are expected to be devoured on Super Bowl Sunday. 69.6 million pounds of avocados will be used to make guacamole. 1.23 Billion chicken wings will be consumed. Wow!

Now, here's another statistic that I find really fascinating. Of the people eating all of that food, how many do you think are eating all by themselves? Venture any guesses? It turns out, statistically about 45% of people watch the Super Bowl alone, or with their immediate families. Now what's interesting about this to me is that this is not how we perceive the Super Bowl, right? If you see a commercial, it's usually a bunch of people on a couch screaming and tossing around popcorn or whatever. Spencer Hutchins, are you going to watch the Super Bowl alone? No! But the reality is that almost half of the people watching the Super Bowl are

watching it alone, and I would venture to say that they either weren't invited or didn't bother to invite someone to watch it with them.

Isn't that what hospitality is? Inviting someone into your home, or being invited? To tell you the truth, I don't think we are very good at hospitality as Americans. I haven't always thought this, but when I spent some time with friends from Africa during seminary, I learned what hospitality could look like. We had gotten to know this family throughout the year and eventually we visited them and ate with them. They told us what their experience had been coming to America from Zimbabwe. They described how, in their culture, they leave their doors open and walk from house to house. Families take care of each other's children. If you needed an egg for a recipe, you didn't drive to the corner store, you knocked on your neighbor's door. It's obviously not a utopia, but in countries like Zimbabwe they are very much communal.

You can imagine the shock it was to come to America. They didn't have a car, didn't have many resources at all. They had gotten there by the skin of their teeth because of a school scholarship. They had hoped someone would invite them to church with them, perhaps drive them there. But they were never invited. It turns out that in American apartments, nobody keeps their doors propped open for people to come in and out of. It was a very lonely, very challenging experience for them to come to our country, even to come into a community of Christians at a seminary. And as Megan and I listened to their story, we realized that we were not as hospitable as we had thought we were. After all, we had never invited them to church, had never even thought to do so. So, I think as Americans we have a lot to learn from other cultures about what it means to invite others into our homes and to our tables. Most of all, as followers of Christ we have a lot to learn from Jesus about being hospitable disciples.

When we read through the Gospels we find that Jesus is in and out of many homes. And in fact, hospitality is one of his biggest concerns... especially when you get into the book of Luke. But even here in Matthew you see that Jesus cares about how we do hospitality, about inviting people into our homes and to our tables and caring for them. I'm going to pick three stories out of the last seven chapters, and with these three stories I'm going to highlight three things that I think Jesus is teaching us about hospitality. Jesus' hospitality is: Free and open, wastefully extravagant, and vulnerable.

Our first story is from the parable of the wedding feast from Matthew 22. Turn there and while you do I'm going to summarize the first part of this parable. Jesus talks about a king who prepares a wedding feast for his son and then invites some of his subjects to come. They, however, refuse to come, manufacturing various excuses and even murdering the king's servants. The king administers justice on those murderers, but then see what he does, beginning in verse 8.

⁸ "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests." (NEW NIV)

Now the context of this parable is that Jesus is in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews.

Jesus has just told a series of parables that all had pretty much the same point: the Jews did not have a monopoly on the kingdom of God. If they would not receive Jesus as their king, there were plenty of others who would. And when Jesus says this, it is clear that he means the gentiles, those who were not Jews. You have to know how incredibly offensive this was to the Jews and use your imagination a little bit. I really hope that this wouldn't happen, but if you could imagine, the equivalent would be if Jesus came to Chapel Hill and said to us, "You have not listened to me, so I'm going to invite Muslims and Democrats and gay people to become my followers." And if you're shocked by that, then you know how the Pharisee's felt. They thought, why would Romans or Samaritans or Greeks deserve to even be invited into the Kingdom of God? But Jesus tells this parable about the Kingdom of Heaven and says, I invited some folks to come and they rejected me. Now the invitation is wide open. Anybody is welcome! Come if you're good, come if you're bad, come if you're ugly... doesn't matter! Just fill the place.

This parable certainly has a spiritual application, in the sense that anyone is welcome in God's Kingdom. But when we think about this parable, and what it tells us about the heart of God, it has real practical implications. Particularly about who we say is in or who is out, of our lives and our homes, and at our tables. I think it means that we broaden our conception about who can be in our homes... about who we care for. I think that's where we begin, not to think of our homes as castles anymore as protection from the outside, but to think of our homes as hospitals and hotels, places of rest and healing. Hospitality, the heart of God, is to freely invite into our homes and to our tables.

Hospitality is not just about this invitation, though, it's about what you do to care for people after the invitation. The other day, I had a number of people over to my house for some training. For the most part, these folks didn't know each other so this was their first introduction to one another. As they were coming in, I was mostly thinking about the logistics of the evening. Making sure the food was ready, etc. So as each person came in, I welcomed them and had them sit down. But I left the conversation up for grabs, left them to figure out how to talk to each other. Now, my wife Megan is a consummate host. She's a natural at this hospitality stuff and I have a lot to learn from her. My mind was on the food, so I would come back into the kitchen each time a guest came in and I would say, "What else needs to be done?" Finally, she hissed at me and said, "What are you

doing in here? Get out there and be with them, they don't know each other. It's awkward for them!" To be honest, I'm okay with awkward. I'm awkward all the time, it's cool. But she had a point. I wasn't thinking about their comfort, I was valuing my comfort over theirs. In fact, I would say that I was being stingy with my hospitality. When Jesus calls us to be hospitable, he wants our care to spill over... to be wastefully extravagant.

In our next story in Matthew 26 we see this beautifully illustrated by the woman who dumps a ton of expensive perfume on Jesus' head.

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. ⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹ "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." ¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you, [a] but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (New NIV)

I'm guessing that if you showed up at someone's house and had a bottle of perfume poured over your head, you'd probably be upset. But in that day and age, it might have been a part of expected hospitality. It was probably a courtesy for travelers who didn't necessarily have access to a shower... a way for folks to smell a little nicer after being on the road. But this, this is extravagant. In the Gospel of Mark, the detail is included in the story that this perfume was worth a years' wages. Can you imagine instead of a spritz of eu-de-cologne from KMart, this lady dumps a 30, 40, 50 thousand dollar bottle of Chanel on Jesus' head. And it's not like he could jump in the shower and get that smell off. He would smell like that perfume for the last part of his life. During his trial, while he was being whipped, all the way to the cross and into the grave. No wonder Jesus said that she had done a beautiful thing.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a hospitality like that woman that stuck with people for days... an extravagant care and love that would stay with them through the times of suffering and pain. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians, followers of Jesus were known as those who extravagantly cared for each other and for others? Wouldn't it be wonderful if people were invited into the home of a follower of Jesus and left feeling like their soul had been doused with extravagant love and care, and that smell was not going to go away for a while?

The hospitality of Jesus is open and free, the hospitality of Jesus is wastefully extravagant, and finally, the hospitality of Jesus is vulnerable.

There's one more story about hospitality that I want to share with you this morning, and that is the story of the Last Supper in Matthew 26. It's interesting to me that some of Jesus' last moments before the cross are taken up by what is essentially just a meal.

There is a certain kind of vulnerability and intimacy that occurs when you have a meal. Because eating a meal is an occasion just ripe for embarrassment. I learned when I was dating Megan that there were certain foods you just didn't eat when you were dating: like spinach, because it could get stuck in your teeth; or corn on the cob; or ribs, because you end up wearing it on your face; or garlic and beans, for obvious reasons. And actually, when you think of the Last Supper as such a holy moment, there were also these elements to it too. Imagine disciples with crumbs falling down their robes, wine dribbling down chins, open mouths chewing when Jesus says, "One of you will betray me." For such a holy moment, it was also a very vulnerable moment. And you know what... Jesus could have shoved the disciples away and said, "Hey, I'm going to suffer soon, and I need some me time." But Jesus doesn't shy away from the vulnerability... he invites his disciples right into it.

And we see this when we are taking communion too, right? I'm always amused when people fumble with communion. Sometimes you might grab a piece of bread and half of it falls off onto the ground. Or you take your bread and you dip it in the cup and it ends up just floating in the cup. Or you're about to eat the bread dipped into the cup and it bounces off your face and onto the floor. The horror! Has that happened to you? But part of this is the point. Eating a meal is vulnerable. Partaking of Jesus' blood and flesh is vulnerable. Don't be embarrassed when that happens. Laugh about it, then grab another piece of bread and experience the grace of God.

I think sometimes we are afraid to be hospitable, to invite people into our homes and to our tables because of the vulnerability that hospitality can cause... because our house is messy, because our life is messy. Sometimes, someone just needs you to invite them into that vulnerability. They don't care if you've got the kids toys put away. They don't care if last night's dishes aren't put away. It might just be more important that you welcomed them in. Let's practice that kind of vulnerable hospitality.

One of the interesting things about Jesus and hospitality is that Jesus was an itinerant preacher, so he didn't have a home to invite people into. He says in Matthew 8:20, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." But in point of fact, he left his home to walk amongst us, to stay in our homes and eat our food. He left his place at the right hand of the Father so that he could go into the highways and the byways, and he could invite us freely and openly to the wedding feast. He walked in our midst and declared to us that his hospitality was wasteful and extravagant, that his love would spill over in his home. He became vulnerable for our sakes and showed us

that he cared more about being present to us than about having it all neat and clean and put together.

When we celebrate communion, we remember Jesus' free, extravagant and vulnerable hospitality. The hospitality of the cross, hospitality that goes above and beyond, hospitality that is extended to a thief on his right hand, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Free and open hospitality, extravagant and wasteful, that he would pour out his life for you and me... certainly not afraid of the vulnerability that he would go through, the pain and humility and suffering to be present to each and every one of us. This morning, I invite you to the table to experience the free, extravagant, and vulnerable hospitality of Christ.