

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Joshua 2:1-7, “Hospitality without Borders”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 7/18/2021**

When I was first discerning my call into ministry

I worked as an intern with University Ministries in Seattle.

Now they only paid \$300 ... a *month* ... for full time ministry.

But to make ends meet the congregation also provided interns

with a homestay who not only gave us a place to live, but also fed us.

And I can tell you that in my early 20s, that was a lot of food.

So these folks who took in University Ministries interns

were definitely practicing radical hospitality,

and I’m forever grateful to the Nelson family for taking me in.

Brian Nelson was an eye surgeon, and he was part of an organization

whose name intrigued me: Doctors without Borders.

Every summer Brian would go to Mexico with other ophthalmologists

and coordinate eye clinics for hundreds if not thousands of people

who had no access to good eyecare.

They brought boxes and boxes of glasses prepared

for every prescription imaginable, and when they fitted the right glasses

for someone and they were able to see clearly for the first time

in years, Brian said it felt like witnessing a miracle of Jesus.

Years later in Minneapolis a congregation member at the church I served there

was Adam Both – a young University of Minnesota student

getting his masters environmental engineering.

Adam participated in a group called Engineers without Borders

and had worked with other engineers to bring plumbing

to numerous villages throughout Uganda.

He used all of his expertise and knowledge and energy to join with others

and be a partner with local villages to bring

life-giving, cleansing, purifying water into their lives.

If we've got Doctors without Borders and Engineers without Borders ...  
what about Hospitality without Borders?

This is our last installment in our series considering how  
love of neighbors + mission = radical hospitality.

We've been talking about loving our neighbors, being a neighbor to others,  
and the mission of God to those who are unlike us.

Now we come to this story from Joshua chapter 2,  
and I think Rahab the prostitute could have started an organization called,  
"Hospitality without Borders."

Now maybe you'd say, "Uh...yeah, but aren't there some borders we  
... you know ... aren't supposed to cross?"

Well, maybe so, but Rahab offered hospitality  
across the borders of national and spiritual allegiance.

Joshua, the new leader of Israel after Moses' death,  
sent two spies out to look over the land of Jericho  
where they were about to enter.

The two spies had few resources of their own and they needed someone  
who would bring them in, who would aid them in their mission.

(If you remember our story from last week, this almost sounds like the 72 disciples  
that Jesus sent out looking for home that would offer them peace, doesn't it?)

Anyway, these spies couldn't go to just anyone's house,  
so they stayed with Rahab, the prostitute—someone they figured  
could keep a secret.

But the secret wasn't as tightly kept as they had hoped –  
the king of Jericho found out that the spies were in her home!  
When the king's messengers arrived, she fed them a phony story  
while the spies were hiding under stalks of flax up on her roof.

Rahab offered hospitality without borders, without regard to nationality,  
without regard to religion. She had heard of these Israelites  
and how God had saved them from slavery from the Red Sea,  
and she hoped that such a God might also save her.

And in fact, when Israel came and the wall of Jericho fell,  
Rahab and her household were spared.  
She crossed borders again and joined in the people of Israel.  
According to Matthew 1:5, Rahab,  
the pagan prostitute of Jericho,  
is included in the lineage of Jesus,  
the Messiah of Israel.

Hospitality without borders, indeed.

I hope that you are seeing again and again that the Bible reveals  
how the mission of God works against expectations,  
the way that Jesus' style hospitality reaches across the borders  
we might feel uncomfortable crossing  
and creates new and surprising connections  
between people who we would never think  
could be reconciled.

Consider for a moment, that this is the very logic of our own salvation.

In Romans 5:8, the Apostle Paul writes,  
"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."  
The living God has made a way of hospitality across the borders  
of holiness and sinfulness, across the borders of life and death.  
And who are the beneficiaries of this generosity? You and me.  
And all who are God's children.

A holy God sending God's-self to take on human form  
to befriend the losers and outsiders, to be shamed on a cross and die  
for those who have rebelled and fallen into the ways of death  
so that they can be brought into the kingdom of life  
everlasting is the definition of radical hospitality.

Do you see now why I have been leading us into this theological equation,  
“love of neighbors + mission = radical hospitality?”  
Without this way of entering into relationship,  
we would be left without any gospel at all.

So it stands to reason that just as we see God’s character on display throughout  
the scriptures but especially in Jesus, we are called to emulate  
this kind of hospitality as we join in what God is doing.

Being a missional congregation doesn’t mean doing more or working harder,  
it means living differently and opening ourselves  
to potentially risky relationships that cross the borders  
of what most people in our demographic would be open to.

When we step across that void, God does amazing things.

Now I want to be clear:

I’m not advocating for hospitality without boundaries.  
It is incredibly important to have good boundaries in our lives.  
We won’t be of much help if we can’t tell where one person’s responsibility  
stops and another begins – that moves us into enmeshed relationships  
and unhealthy connections that don’t have good outcomes.

So please know, radical hospitality is not the end of personal boundaries.  
When I’m talking about crossing borders I mean the artificial lines  
that our society uses to say, “you’re like me” or “you’re not like me,”  
and the human tendency to focus our relationships  
on those who are like us, who are on our side.

What’s an example of that?

Last month we had the crazy heat wave of 115 degrees or something.

Just before that weekend hit, I participated in an emergency Zoom meeting  
along with many other churches, non-profits and elected leaders  
in our county.

We talked about how to coordinate cooling centers  
and provide air conditioners all across our county.

You have probably heard that this climate change-induced heat wave  
resulted in the worst natural disaster in Oregon's history, as 116  
people were killed by the heat across the state.

Well I just learned that after so many in Yamhill County reached across  
the borders of their ordinary areas of operation that Yamhill County  
had zero deaths. No deaths!

Howie Harkema, a tireless advocate for those without shelter,  
said that he has never seen our county coordinate an effort  
across so many different organizations.

As a county provided hospitality across dividing lines of wealth and ownership  
and status in our county, and in a time of great danger  
for vulnerable populations, nobody died.

That is hospitality across borders.

God's character was on display in Rahab.

God's character is one of crossing the dividing lines  
so that we can be welcomed into the life of God's Spirit.

God's way of life is a missional life that extends to the  
whole breadth of creation.

When we see that this is how God has loved us,  
when we see that this is the mission which God's Spirit empowers us for,  
and when we connect that mission with love for those we are called  
to be neighbors to,

we are both recipients of Jesus' radical hospitality  
and conduits of it in the world.