

02.16.25 ~ Epiphany 6
“Relationships and Hospitality”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 28:1-2, 6-9 ^{NIV}

Of David.

¹ To you, Lord, I call;
you are my Rock,
do not turn a deaf ear to me.

For if you remain silent,
I will be like those who go down to the pit.

² Hear my cry for mercy
as I call to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your Most Holy Place . . .

⁶ Praise be to the Lord,
for he has heard my cry for mercy.

⁷ The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.

My heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I praise him.

⁸ The Lord is the strength of his people,
a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

⁹ Save your people and bless your inheritance;
be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Leader: These Words of Prayer and Praise Are from God.
People: Thanks be to God!

Philemon 1:1-12 ^{NLT}

¹⁵ It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. ¹⁶ He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL!

²⁰ Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ.

²¹ I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more! ²² One more thing—please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

Leader: These Words of Paul Are from God.
All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God of provision, we thank you for the rain yesterday. We now gather again to worship you and have fellowship with you and each other. Thank you for the words, prayers, and music already shared. Please help us to hear your message of deep purpose and hospitality in my words today. Clear our thoughts, Lord, to receive your direction as we continue this topic, bridging our church identity and purpose with our community, Mission Center partners, and our world. May **your** voice strengthen us for the week to come and motivate us to dig deep into Scripture seeking your presence. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you all for welcoming Sean and Cara Roberds so beautifully last week. They sent us a thank you note you can read on the bulletin board outside the Fellowship Hall.

And I hope you had a nice Super Bowl and Valentine's Day! Both kinds of Souper Bowl. You have another week to bring non-perishable food to help the ACCA Food Pantry, a tangible way to show hospitality to those in need. Our relationship with ACCA goes back decades and they count on our generosity, budget, food, and special gifts. So, thank you in advance.

In the companion psalm, Psalm 26, and today's reading, Psalm 28, the setting is the sanctuary. David had washed his hands, purified himself, and asked God to separate him from the fate of common sinners. One might perceive that that request was a bit arrogant; however, because of his deep relationship with God, and his early anointing to become King, he courageously petitioned God to protect him and to show him mercy. His prayer was sincere; he also asked for the salvation of the nation Israel, and that God would support them in all trials and tribulations.

Some might call this psalm David's "bargaining prayer;" and don't we sometimes bargain with God for certain things or in difficult

circumstances? We almost beg in negotiation with God when things get really tough or there is a life and death situation, but that human response is not helpful. We must go to God in submission and humility instead.

Psalm 26 boasts of David's hospitality toward the Lord, through his excellent and frequent worship and fervent prayer. That sanctuary, its altars, rituals, songs of praise, and devotion he writes about should make David worthy of God's deliverance from judgment. But here is another example of putting the practical, tangible part of hospitality before deeper spiritual motivations of hospitality. What we hear though in Psalm 28 is that the relationship between David and God is so sound and strong a foundation that deliverance would be a natural result of love and commitment. And so it should also be for us: unconditional, merciful, and consequential love and forgiveness.

How do your prayers and worship measure up to that? Are we hospitable to God in the first place? Or do we bargain until he shows us a miracle? Love is unconditional; hospitality is a gift also that is unconditional. If we love and expect reciprocity, that fails us every time. If we are hospitable expecting a reciprocal invitation to something, that is sinful and arrogant. Yes, it might be the cultural expectation, but Jesus in Luke 14 teaches us otherwise; forgive the indelicate translation:

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. **Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**"

It should be the same with generosity—giving things to those who can never pay us back—that is Christ-like hospitality.

In our second passage, the imprisoned apostle Paul's connection with Onesimus may have started out as master and slave, which is a conditional, reciprocal relationship, but it did not stay that way. Relationships are NOT transactional; slavery is illegal. What Paul's letter to Philemon does is address the cultural, transactional model of slavery, usefulness, cost, value, and purpose of that period, and illustrates the Christ-like transformational experience of Christian obedience. The Christian life is **not** conditional or transactional—if you do this, God will do that. Jesus is transformational! He paid the price for our sins and wrongdoing on the cross, forgiving us spiritually and transforming our very lives on earth and for eternity.

Today's culture idolizes "Unreasonable Hospitality: The Remarkable Power of Giving People More Than They Expect," a book written in 2022 by Will Guidara. I heard him speak online at the Global Leadership Summit last year with NorthStar. Even culturally, this unreasonable hospitality he described requires no reciprocity or obligatory invitation to the party. A radical or unreasonable view of hospitality is exactly what we are exploring because it models Christ's welcoming and extraordinary vision: feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and fishes! That's an unreasonable and miraculous vision of welcome. However, another term, "extravagant hospitality" competes for the most beautiful décor, the biggest budgets, or the most daring first impression. The average wedding last year ran from \$33,000 in Virginia to \$48,000 in Washington DC. That includes catering, space, décor, staff, and music. Extravagant, competitive hospitality means stuff, swag bags, gifts, gold, Rolex watches, perfume, lavish spaces, black tie, and décor.

Vital, unconditional hospitality, however, is based on relationships, creativity, love, joy, feelings, collaboration, connection, heart moments and more; these qualities do not usually have any cost associated with them, yet they are more profound and remembered.

The apostle Paul says, “I will repay the price,” and you owe me everything because through Jesus, I saved your soul! It sounds like he just wants Philemon to release Onesimus and send him back to him. In reality, the benefit Paul wants is the refreshing of his heart, a priceless transformation, not a transaction. I admit that the last few verses sound like reciprocity: make up a spare room for me, because I am coming to see you; you owe me that much Paul says. But if we consider the whole letter, Paul implies that this slave has become more than his helper and more like his son. There is mutual love between them.

That understanding for all three is no longer transactional but transformational, born out of relationships between each and God. We must explore our own motives every time we offer hospitality, expect, or demand it. What is our intention? Are we checking a box? Or have we ourselves been transformed to welcome all? Hospitality is lifegiving to your spiritual, emotional, and physical self as well as to our community; and it is essential to the life and thriving of this church! Amen! ||

Let us pray. Jesus, we thank you for your teaching, your life model, and your sacrifice. Open our hearts personally and as a church to answer your call to hospitality for 2025. Help us have true motives to understand it. May your divine guidance strengthen our Bible study, mission, and purpose, drawing us together to pray, seek you, serve others in need, and to share our faith. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.