

**A Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost
July 20, 2025**



Come to New Life!

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Click Here for today's Readings:

[Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Genesis 18:1-10a, Luke 10:38-42

Radical Hospitality

I'd like to talk about hospitality today. The Gospel story of Jesus visiting his friends Mary and Martha is ripe with implications for how to receive guests. An even better lesson comes from the story of Abraham and Sarah in the desert, offering hospitality to strangers. This wonderful story from Genesis is enshrined in the icon on our altar, so we have it always before us. The Genesis reading is an alternate for today – we read Amos this morning but let me remind you of the other reading.

Abraham and Sarah have been married a long time, oh, say 70 years. They have a close relationship with God, who keeps telling them that they will have lots of offspring, as many as the stars in heaven, but after 70 years with still no children, they are beginning to wonder. They live in a tent in the Negev desert. There is a standard for hospitality when you live in the desert: if anyone comes by, you must offer them food and drink – especially water. If you don't, your visitors are likely to die. This is the expected hospitality: you take care of those who come to you, and they will take care of you likewise if you come to them. So, at least give them some bread and water!

But what happens in this story? Abraham is the perfect host. Three strangers come to his door, and he pulls out all the stops. Hey, Sarah, we have company! Make some bread, bring out the cheese, kill the fatted calf and prepare a banquet! The three strangers are treated to a lavish meal. One of them says they will come back next year and by then, Abraham and Sarah will have a son. That great promise, again, and this time, it comes true. We can see it as a response to generous hospitality. This hospitality is relational.

In the story of Mary and Martha entertaining Jesus, some of the expectations of hospitality are a little strained. Martha is in the kitchen, banging around the pots and pans, getting more and more exasperated with no help. Mary is in with the guests, sitting at Jesus' feet, interacting with them. Martha complains that she has no help, and Jesus responds that Mary is doing what is more important. And what is that? Interacting with the guests, not just serving them food.

Both of these stories have lessons for us. Here's another story, from a mentor of mine named Eric Law, who advises parishes on how to welcome the stranger. He mentions one parish that achieved extraordinary growth by interacting with visitors during funerals. It is a time when many strangers come to our doors, into an emotionally charged atmosphere filled with memory and grief. We offer a meaningful liturgy and often a reception afterwards. But Eric said this particular church in his example did way more than that. They greeted the guests generously, pointed out the location of the sanctuary, the bathrooms, the reception room, made sure they had bulletins,

encouraged them to sit with someone they knew. The parishioners interacted with everyone who came. The church doubled in size. New members were asked what encouraged them to come there, and most of them mentioned funerals, how they were greeted and treated. They weren't just ushered in, but were made truly comfortable, in a budding relationship.

I have noticed your extraordinarily friendly efforts for Adults with Disabilities. You welcome them into our entertainment space, you shower them with gifts, you provide food and entertainment. But perhaps most importantly, you interact with them. You sit at the tables with them and participate in the activities. This is holy time, a true offering of yourselves.

Right now we have an action team looking at various ways to expand our presence in the wider community, with new promotional materials, signage, and digital presence. It is coming along and you will see some new visibility soon. We are planning a Homecoming event on the first Sunday in September, and we will encourage you to invite friends to attend church that day.

And if new or former friends come that day? How shall we greet them?

We can all be greeters, all the time. Charlyn Bridges, one of our team members, has written a wonderful piece that details how we can be truly hospitable. The article will be in your next newsletter. But allow me to quote from it now.

Imagine visiting a church for the first time.

Will you be welcomed? Will you be noticed?

Visitors are welcome at New Life. We are all greeters, officially or unofficially.

When we sense that someone has come to visit, step forward and welcome them.

- Ask if they could sign our guest book
- Give them a name tag and church bulletin
- Ask if they've ever attended an Episcopal Church service before
 - If not, ask a church member to sit with them and help follow the service
- Point out the rest rooms.
- Introduce the newcomer to Rev. Barbara and other church members.
- If coffee hour is scheduled, make sure they're included.
- Welcome — but not overwhelm visitors. Visitors will want some space to take in their new surroundings.

This is wise advice. Let us take it in and make it our own welcoming behavior, when the God in us meets the God in others. Radical hospitality is not something new to us. It is our nature.