

FRUITFUL LIVING: RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Text: 1 John 4:7-11, 19

Five Practices of Fruitful Living, Ch. 1

LHUMC 10/7/12

Stewardship Campaign #1

I. Introduction

A. Some background about *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*

1. Written by Robert Schnase, UM Bishop in Missouri.
2. A sequel to *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (where the five practices are the same, but in that book, he is specifically addressing how churches can become more vital and fruitful by emphasizing these practices).
3. Both are being read by our VCI team as a part of the reading list for our training sessions.
4. I will be making some connections between the two books, because we are called to live out our fruitfulness both personally and in community.
5. Or in other words, achieving greater fruitfulness in our personal journeys of discipleship can't help but lead to greater fruitfulness in our church and vice versa.

B. And one thing that has become clear to me, as I've read both of the books, and what makes Bishop Schnase's message both powerful and challenging is those adjectives.

1. For on the face of it, I really think that as a church and as individuals, we are at least aware of the importance of these five practices and most of the time, as good disciples and good church members, we do a pretty good job of trying to live them out.
2. Who doesn't want to be hospitable? Who doesn't get something out of worship? Who doesn't try to increase our faith? Who doesn't see the importance of mission and service? Who doesn't try to be generous?
3. It's those adjectives that sometimes keep me awake at night! Radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, extravagant generosity. Those adjectives take this discipleship thing, this church thing, this fruitfulness thing to a whole new level. In fact, it implies that we are to bear and share a proverbial bumper crop of fruit at a number of levels.

4. So in the next five weeks, we're going to wrestle with those adjectives. We'll talk about what it takes, what it looks like, what it doesn't look like to be even more fruitful in our daily living.
 - C. And the other thing we'll discover is that all of these practices build upon each other—that it all leads to that final chapter that talks about extravagant generosity.
 - D. And beyond that, what we will also be learning is that it's all about stewardship. These practices of fruitful living in the end are not things that we manufacture on our own—they are gifts that we receive from God. And then as we share them with each other and with the world, they become acts of stewardship, which as we keep talking about, is our sharing of all the gifts we've been given by God with God's world.
- II. So with all of that in mind, let's talk about radical hospitality.
- A. And if you're reading the book, that first chapter is probably not what you expected. And me neither, to be honest. I had read the first book about fruitful congregations, and the first chapter in that book is what I did expect—all about churches reaching out and opening their doors to the community in radical ways.
 1. The first chapter of this book sort of puzzled me at first.
 2. It talks very little about us as individuals reaching out to the community and opening the doors of our homes and churches to those who are different than us.
 3. It talks a lot about God and God's love and us learning to be more hospitable to God in our lives.
 4. It uses the passage that we heard from 1 John as a centerpiece—a passage that is all about God's love and how blessed we are to receive it and then to have all of these opportunities to give it away.
 - B. And as I was reading, I'm thinking that seems so obvious—being hospitable to God seems like a no-brainer—until I looked at my own life and saw those times in my own life for whatever reason, I was probably less likely to welcome God into my life. Which brings us to our circle of chairs—If orange chair is God, how well are you doing in welcoming God into your inner circle? On a daily basis, is God in your circle, or out? Robert Schnase gives some examples in the book of different people and their stories and why this can be a struggle sometimes.

1. He speaks of times when we have messed up and can't imagine that God would want anything to do with us, let alone be a part of our inner circle.
2. Or times when we feel that God is some great cosmic entity out there that is way beyond caring about our daily lives.
3. Or times when we listen to what he calls "cultural voices that make it hard to open us to a more spiritual life." This one really got my attention.
 - a) He talks about this risk of superficial living that threatens to infuse every area of our lives, including our relationships with others and most importantly, our relationship with God.
 - b) And the risk comes from so many different directions—from our technological "advances" that tempt us to have absolutely no face-to-face conversations with anyone, to the emphasis on material success at the expense of our relationships because we are busier and busier trying to accumulate more stuff, and then he talks about what he simply calls the "pressing immediacy of what's expected next from us."
 - c) And then he sums it up by saying "this risk is a rather shallow and surface existence, where we invest enormous amounts of time, passion, and energy in many things that simply do not merit it."
 - d) And what gets harmed the most amidst all of the busyness and superficiality? Our willingness to be hospitable to God—to allow him into the inner circle of our lives and to have a deeper relationship with Him and so a good part of the time, God winds up outside our circle. **(Chair out)**
 - e) And his point is that to truly be hospitable to God these days really is an act of radical hospitality. To understand that God loves us and forgives us when we mess up, to understand that God is there for us in all of the ups and downs of life, and to know that more than anything else, God wants to have a deep and substantial relationship with us—all of those can be radical understandings these days.
4. And I love all the ways he describes what that's like in our lives when we are radically hospitable to God. He says things like:
 - a) We have to "make room in our hearts for God."
 - b) We have to "actively demonstrate an intentional receptivity to God."

- c) And then the one that hit me where I live, we have to “invite interruptions by God into our lives.” As if God was that person who calls us on our phones or knocks on our door right when we are ready to go somewhere and we graciously and hospitably ask them in to stay. Can we do that with God?

III. And so as I’ve begun to put both books together, and as I’ve pondered today’s scripture, what I’m starting to understand is that this kind of radical personal hospitality to God and God’s love is absolutely essential if we are to be radically hospitable as people and as a church to people on the outside who are different than us. As 1 John puts it this morning, “The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God...First we were loved, now we love.” Or to put it a little differently, until we put God in our circle, (**Chair in**) it’s hard to welcome others into it.

A. And as I ponder what that kind of hospitality looks like (and the first book on congregational fruitfulness gives some great examples) I always remember the famous story by Fred Craddock about what it doesn’t look like and what the long-term consequences can be if we aren’t radically hospitable as a church to those outside of our circle:

B. What a cautionary tale that is! The restaurant at the end of the story reminds me of something else Fred Craddock once said—something to the effect that some churches he has been in seem to have an unseen sign like that you see in restaurants—“No shirts, no shoes, no service”. He says that sometimes you walk into a church, and you can’t see the sign, you can just tell it in the attitude of the place.

C. So if that’s what radical hospitality doesn’t look like in a church what does it look like?

1. Around here, it looks a little like Family Promise, or Vacation Bible School. It looks a little like our time at the beginning of the service when we reach out to greet someone who we don’t recognize, when we give a mug to a visitor, when our greeters and ushers do what they do faithfully every week.

2. But that’s just a beginning. And only God knows what radical hospitality might look like down the road for us here at Lake Harbor and for each of us as individuals as we begin to be as radically hospitable to others as God has been to each of us through his love and grace.

3. But as the book says, until we are radically hospitable to God, it's hard to be radically hospitable to other people.

IV. Conclusion

- A. And now as we gather at the table for communion, we are about to get another glimpse of radical hospitality.
- B. One of the things I love about being a United Methodist is that when we say the table is open for communion we really mean it. Our communion table is a place where radical hospitality is practiced as we invite all to come, regardless of age or background or denomination, or where you are in your faith journey.
- C. And especially today on World Communion Sunday, we are experiencing the radical hospitality of God through Jesus Christ where all followers all around the world are gathering at the table with us.
- D. What a model this is for us, as those who have experienced God's love and who are now called to open our hearts and our lives and our church in the same kind of love as witnessed in our radical hospitality of Him and of others.
- E. So let us come to the table now with joy as those who, in the taking of the bread and the cup, will experience again both the blessing and the responsibility of God's radical hospitality.