

Mi Casa es Su Casa

Roman 12:3-13

Mi Casa es Su Casa. Even if you don't speak Spanish this is probably a familiar phrase. Mi Casa es Su Casa – My house is your house, an invitation to enter into fellowship with one another. To get started today I've taken the liberty of paraphrasing some familiar Scriptures:

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Acts 16:14-15 (NIV)

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him (saying), *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Luke 10:38 (NIV)

³ So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, (saying) *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Joshua 2:3-4 (NIV)

16 When the news reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. **19** "You are also directed to tell them, 'Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. **20** Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'" *Mi Casa es Su Casa.* Genesis 45:16, 19-20 (NIV)

29 Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. **31** "Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Genesis 24:29, 31 (NIV)

19 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. **2** "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Genesis 19:1-2 (NIV)

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. **2** Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. **3** He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,^[a] do not pass your servant by. *Mi Casa es Su Casa* Genesis 18:1-3 (NIV)

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed, saying *Mi Casa es Su Casa*
Genesis 2:8 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the earth and the sky, all plant life and vegetation, the beasts of the air, and on the earth, and in the seas, and God created man. In doing so God also created hospitality. God invited man into His creation, to share in the wonder and beauty of the Creation, and to have relationship with one another.

The dictionary tells us that hospitality means the “reception and entertainment of strangers and guests”. In ancient times the practice of hospitality was required. It was risky business because hospitality was offered to strangers and enemies. Yes, even enemies (think of the story of the woman, Jael, and the enemy’s general, Sisera). Codes of hospitality were so strict that if your enemy appeared at your door asking for food and shelter it was your duty to provide not only food and shelter, but protection as long as he remained on your property (Okay, so Jael fell short on that requirement when she drove the tent peg through Sisera’s skull. That’s a discussion for another time). We find many examples of hospitality in the Bible in addition to those I have already read: Abigail and David; David and Mephibosheth, son of his friend Jonathan; Elijah and the widow of Zarephath; Ananias of Damascus and Saul of Tarsus; and I’m sure you can think of others, too.

Mortimer Arias, a professor of mission and evangelism, says that “the remarkable explosion of Christianity in the first century was due not only to proclamation of the Gospel, but to the extraordinary quality of Christian hospitality.” This did not go unnoticed in its time, as one Roman emperor commanded his governors to begin practicing hospitality like that of the Christians if they wanted their empire to grow and remain civil.

How is it then, if hospitality was practiced among most of the ancient civilizations that the Christian practice of hospitality should stand out? Could it be that hospitality practiced as a social act is not the same as hospitality practiced as a sacred act?

Hospitality as practiced by God’s people was understood to be a way to meet and receive the holy presence. People received apostles, angels, and even God Himself, when practicing hospitality. St. Benedict held out this rule, “All guests to the monastery should be welcomed as Christ, because He will say, ‘I was a stranger, and you took me in.’” The modern-day institutions of hospitals and hospices originated with the hospitality of St. Benedict and others like him who took in travelers and cared for them. Benedict reminds us of Christ’s call to care for the least of these, to offer hospitality to those who cannot possibly return the favor. Just as He Himself offered hospitality in a way that we cannot repay.

Adam was the first beneficiary of Divine hospitality, receiving a gift he could not reciprocate. God created a place for Adam to live and provided him with

food. I think most of us when considering hospitality think first of food. But hospitality is more than just food. The elements of hospitality beyond food and drink include: shelter and rest, protection and care, enjoyment and peace, addressing man's basic range of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Hospitality is always concerned with the well-being of the guest. Yet in offering hospitality, we are often the ones who receive a blessing.

After the Fall, God continued to practice hospitality. He sent his son, Jesus, to restore the original God/man relationship, but people would not receive him. Many people have refused to accept God's hospitality offered through Christ. Do you? I know I have at times missed an opportunity to participate in God's hospitality. How do we close the door on God's hospitality? Has someone offered to help you in a time of need, and you declined the offer? Has someone invited you to their home or a church function and you made an excuse not to go? How will we ever know the blessings we may have missed? What would have happened had Cleopas and his traveling companion on the Emmaus road not invited the stranger into their conversation and later to dine with them? They would have missed out on meeting the risen Christ!

This example of Cleopas on the road points to another interesting aspect of hospitality, it does not have to happen in someone's home. Cleopas offered hospitality on the road. Jesus says we can offer hospitality to the prisoner in jail, or to the ill and suffering wherever they are. Hospitality does not require a place, it requires a willingness to accept people as they are, where they are,

and to enter into their reality in a gracious manner. What does that look like, you might ask? Here are a few examples:

At home: is everyone in the family accepted for who they are, are they given the opportunity to express themselves and develop their own particular talents? Is forgiveness practiced in the home? Is the relationship of the adults in the family a positive one? Have you ever found yourself in the presence of a couple who insist on airing their “dirty laundry” in your presence? Because they are not hospitable to one another, they are unable to be hospitable to others.

At work: listening honestly and openly to co-workers, respecting one another’s workspace, maintaining a pleasant physical work environment, and if you are a supervisor maintaining an “open door” policy. That is not to say that you can’t ever close a door to accomplish a task, just that those who work for you should be able to feel that you are approachable.

In the neighborhood: In today’s rush-rush and highly transient society this is not as easily accomplished as in the past, but it is necessary. Be intentional about meeting your neighbors, offer to watch a neighbor’s house when they are away, water their plants or walk their dog, spend time with an elderly neighbor, throw a block party and have everyone bring a favorite dish, or babysit for the young couple or single mother down the street.

At church: Invite guests, speak the truth in love remembering we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, PRAY – inviting God and others in. In prayer

ask God how he would like you to practice hospitality and then follow through. Rod and I have felt a call to entertain people in our home. When we remodeled our kitchen several years ago, we held a blessing with family and friends, dedicating our kitchen and our home to serving the Lord in hospitality.

How does the church as a whole practice hospitality? Here at Hatfield, we offer a day care program made affordable to low-income families through a state subsidy program, the food cupboard that helps individuals and families by providing nutritious food, and support for the wider church, both locally and globally. Is there something else you feel we are called to do? Seek an answer in prayer.

Have you ever thought about civic hospitality? Working to provide parks, walking paths and other open space ideas. Rallying to provide equality in education, or working to improve services available to the elderly, disabled, or destitute. Hospitality is a way of “doing justice” in society. The Biblical meaning of justice is right relationships. Practicing right relationships is practicing righteousness.

God is asking each of us to say to another *Mi Casa es Su Casa*. What will that look like for each of us? Will it be a sit down, 7-course meal in a mansion, or a cup of cold water on a street corner? Will it be a blanket for a homeless person or a roll-away bed in the family room? Will it be introducing

ourselves to the new person at church or offering a ride to a doctor's appointment? Whatever form it takes, God will bless both giver and receiver.

As I end this morning, please keep these words from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews in mind this week:

2 Forget not to show hospitality to strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Heb 13:2 (ASV)

May we each welcome angels unawares!

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Hatfield Church of the Brethren