

Session #7: God's Gift Economy: Learning to be a Community of Hospitality

Focal Question What can we say about the distinct shape of God's in-breaking reign to which we are called to be embodied witnesses/signposts?

God's Economy The dynamic at the heart of God's reign: an economy of the open hand that entails first *receiving* God's good and transformative gifts and then *keeping them in circulation*.

Mt 10:7-8: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

Preeminence of Love "God is love. . . . We love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:7-21)
Agape: The relentless pursuit of the well-being of another through the giving of oneself.

The Gift of Faith as Trust God's economy: We trust because God first trusted us. (Ponder all that God has entrusted to us as stewards.)

The Gift of Forgiveness God's economy: We forgive because God in Christ has forgiven us (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13);
The Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us (Matthew 6:12-15).

The Gifts of Good Work and Good Rest God's economy: We seek to create good work and good rest for others because God has offered us good work and good rest.

Good work offers us the privilege of participating with God in bringing a greater measure of healing and wholeness to a broken world.

Good rest offers us the privilege of stepping back from our work to reflect on the meaning and purpose of our lives; to give thanks and praise to the Triune God who creates, redeems and sustains all that exists; to take delight in all of God's creation, including the work of our hands when that work contributes to God's reign of *shalom*.

The Gift of Hospitality "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have welcomed angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2).

What do we tend to mean by "hospitality" in everyday usage in our day?

What is distinct about biblical or Christian "hospitality"?

1. Focused on the love, care, and concern for strangers (the vulnerable, the one on the margins, the "other")
2. Not simply doing something *for* the stranger, but "making room" for the stranger; gifts go both ways.

Gen 18:1-15 Abraham, Sarah and the Three Strangers

Deut 10:17-19 Yahweh loves the strangers and commands Israel to do as well, because they were once strangers

Luke 14:12-14 Jesus talks about who to invite to dinner in his own complicated status-conscious context

Luke 24: 13-35 The risen Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus

God's economy: We make room for others in our life because God first made room for us in God's very life.

Reflection Questions:

1. The “stranger” can take lots of different forms. Where in your daily life do you already practice something like “loving care for the stranger”? What has been your experience of doing so?
2. Can you think of a time in your life when *you* were the “stranger” and someone lovingly cared for you? What was that like? Why might it be important to remember what it’s like to be the recipient of hospitality?
3. If biblical hospitality is about “making room” for the “stranger,” in what sense is God’s creation of the world an act of hospitality?
4. How has our culture formed us to think of “strangers” (“stranger danger,” etc.) and how has that formation created obstacles for us to lovingly care for the stranger? What wisdom do you have around these real challenges given your own experience?
5. Scripture and the Christian tradition insist that our encounters with “the least of these,” including “the stranger,” might in fact be an encounter with Jesus (Matt 25: 31-26). How might it change your mindset around encounters with strangers if you realized you might not be introducing “the stranger” *to* Jesus, but you might be meeting Jesus *in* the stranger?

Resources:

“Offering Hospitality,” Christine Pohl (An excerpt from her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*) <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/community/service/hospitality-in-christian-community>

This section of her book helpfully deals with the challenges of limits and boundaries.

Andrei Rublev’s Icon of the Trinity (c. 1410); a link to an interactive exploration of the symbolism of the icon:

http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/rublevs_icon/rublev.htm

