

Gracious God,

May these words be your words of life.

Amen

I have to confess, that, though I will easily talk to people at gas stations about almost anything, or strike up a conversation in a line for a movie, I just don't want to talk to a soul when I fly. I don't like flying and I just would prefer to look out among the clouds or create a silent bubble. No discussion of the book I am reading, or the weather...I just want to be left alone. On the other hand, my friend has developed good friendships on planes, rocked many a screaming baby to sleep .... When a group of us went on a bike tour with her, a man who we did not know crashed and burned on his bike and could not ride for the rest of the week. She invited him to be a part of our crew..... Gave him her car to drive for the day, gave him our hotel rooms so he could heal... we ended up camping out. With laughter and song we got to know him and all about his family.... And for years he sent all of us Christmas cards. Her home makes mine look like the front cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*, yet the whole neighborhood knows they are welcome any time. From the grandmother who used to bake her children cookies to the motorcycle gang across the street, to the homeless man she befriended when she was working, they all stop by and all are welcomed. We resist opening our lives to others this way. We have become a private society and

have created quiet havens that are closed. "I don't have time" we say... or "My house is a mess" we say... we close our doors to our homes and to our very lives as we seek privacy. It is safer that way. It is easier that way.

Yet, in the early church the act of hospitality was seen as more of a spiritual practice than prayer. That is how important it is to our spiritual lives.

In the Old Testament, offering hospitality to the stranger was seen as essential because the Hebrew people had been sojourners; they had been strangers in a foreign land. They had depended on others. And God wanted them to be people on whom others could depend.

There was the widow who had nothing, who shared her last meal with a prophet she had never met before. He just wandered into town and asked for a meal.... Even though she was distraught and tired and alone, she opened her home to this prophet. At first she was resistant, then reluctant.... She has been preparing to starve as she prepared the last little food she had. Instead she took one little bit of biscuit dough and pinched it into 3 tiny biscuits-one for the prophet, then one for her son and for her. ...And by opening that door of hospitality, she discovered hope, miracles... and that she was not alone.

Abraham on a hot summer day was sitting under the shade of a tree when 3 strangers appeared. Abraham offered them a lavish meal that was worthy of a king. It was like Thanksgiving Day. The table was spread with the best! And these strangers gave him the news that he would soon have a new son. The book of Hebrews tells us- "Don't forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so you might entertain angels without realizing it." Each person is sacred- no matter what they look like, what they wear, where they come from, They are a part of the sacred breath of God.

In our scripture today, we see so many issues about hospitality. Jesus enters a home and is not greeted with even the proper etiquette. It is almost as if the host had never read Emily Post of Ancient times. Everyone wore sandals, everyone arrived with dusty feet. It was expected that when a person entered a home, the host have a basin of water and someone to wash their feet... They reclined when they ate. Their feet were in plain view. If they didn't wash their feet... well you get the idea. Well, when Jesus entered this home, he was not greeted with basic care. And then this woman comes in, uninvited, and she pours expensive oil on him and she cried tears and washes his feet. Well the dinner party was appalled. They knew, or thought they knew this woman by her reputation. And they judged her. But,

Jesus saw things a different way. He compared and contrasted what true hospitality is or isn't.

The Pharisee offered stingy hospitality. He didn't make Jesus feel welcome. His home judged the woman. On the other hand this woman offered Jesus extravagant care. As a colleague says, it reminds us of praying dangerously. - Praying with abandoned... believing in the impossible... doing the outrageous... making a scene for the sake of Christ. Jesus understood that this woman had listened deeply. Her act was an act that reflected and understanding of who he was and what he was about to face. She knew him. And out of a place of deep, deep love, she shared her tears.

You see, hospitality is about more than inviting someone into your home. It is about inviting people into our lives. It is about making a place for God and God's people in our lives. It is about listening, being interested in the lives of others... caring about what happens in their lives... sacrificing comfort, letting go of judgment... and lavishly offering forgiveness. Jesus lavishly offered forgiveness, just as she lavishly offered her tears. Hospitality is not about turning our lives into something they are not. It is about creating a life in which hospitality come naturally. That involves intentional openness to God's grace, openness to others... creating space in our lives.

In Mudhouse Sabbath, Lauren Winner offers this-  
"Creation is the ultimate expression of God's hospitality to God's creatures. In the words of one rabbi, everything God created is a MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S KINDNESS... The world is one big hospitality inn. As Amy Oden has put it GOD OFFERS HOSPITALITY TO ALL OF HUMANITY. Our hospitality is a response of gratitude for God who has made a home for us.