

Making Room

1 Peter 4:7-11

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We come again to the Book of 1 Peter. We have been in a series of this letter of 1 Peter, and just by way of telescoping, we will be finished with 1 Peter towards the beginning of June, and then we will begin a summer series soon to be announced. But this morning we've been in this part of 1 Peter looking specifically at 4:7-11. And what we've been doing over the last number of weeks is breaking out some of these verses and just looking at them individually. We'll be doing the same this morning. This morning, as you all note, is on verse nine, and you'll see in your outline the idea of making room. It is the biblical doctrine, the biblical notion and idea, of hospitality.

What comes to your mind when you think of hospitality? Growing up in the South, a lot of things come to my mind. Generally speaking, it meant a lot of work on my mother's part preparing a room that it seems like they spent as much time on the room as they did on the meal. Everything and all the utensils in all the right place, her mother's china, her mother's mother's china as well, and all the fixings and everything, and it all was just right, and we all would dress up, and we would all be prepared. And there was also the smaller gatherings of hospitality. We, as I've told before, we were not an active part of any congregation. So what hospitality looked like in the South in a given church generally when we did go, it was to the Baptist church, and it looked like a lot of different things.

I remember a number of months that I attended an EV Free church on the west side of Chicago while in college, the Rock of Our Salvation Evangelical Free Church—mouthful of a church name. But every Sunday was generally a four to five hour experience. After worship, we would spend an additional two hours every Sunday in a meal together. But also growing up, hospitality and making room for others had that awkwardness of a middle school and high school lunchroom. Those of you who are in middle school and high school know exactly what I'm talking about. You walk into the room, if you're new, and you wonder who will make room for me at their table. But if you are part of the cool crowd or the I-hate-everybody-else crowd—that was generally my side of the room—you would sit at a table and you would handpick who was and who was not welcome at your table. And sometimes even your friends, if they embarrassed you, you would not make room for them.

Making room and hospitality often, however, in our modern day, has been largely shaped—with no disrespect whatsoever—by Martha Stewart and those who followed her, even those before her. The idea of hospitality when we speak of it generally draws up notions of coziness, perhaps luxury, fancy meals. Is that what hospitality is? I remember the first man that I served with in my ministry as an assistant pastor. My senior pastor who was with me, he and his wife, generally speaking, saw hospitality as a card table and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. That was their way. And coming from the South, that was a great image for what hospitality was.

And as we look at the Scriptures, I want you to walk with me to look at this idea, this doctrine, even this command as it is given to us in verse nine. And my hope is as we walk into this together, into the Scriptures, that the Lord by his Holy Spirit—and hopefully the Lord would use my words—that he might open up for you an entirely new world. However, I want to invite you with me not into a world of guilt, of how often you have people over to your home or what kind of meals you serve or don't serve. I want you to walk into the house with me of the Lord, to see actually how it is all at the center of our faith. And really, at the beginning and the end, it is really about grace—showing grace to others. Let's hear 1 Peter 4:7-11.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another

earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. [And everyone said:] Amen. [1 Peter 4:7-11, ESV]

Let's pray together.

Now, Lord, we ask by your power and your promise—but even most importantly by your presence through your Holy Spirit—we pray that you would open up our hearts, open up our minds and our imagination to see just how hospitable you are, and how, oh Lord, that ought to shape us, and what it might look like for us. Open this to us, we pray, to make us the people of God shaped by the work of Christ for mission in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You see in your outline three ideas. First, when Peter writes, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling," there is implied in it these three things. First, otherness; secondly, from the heart; thirdly, mystery. So together let's look at this idea of making room, hospitality, first as otherness.

Well, first of all, it's there in the passage. So I'm not just dreaming up otherness. When he says, "Show hospitality to one another." The idea of hospitality, if we're to understand it at all, requires that we do a brief—but I hope helpful—look at the history of the word *hospitality*. There are two lenses through which we understand the word as it has come to us in the English. The first is the Greek word from which we translate the word *hospitality*, and it is *philoxenia*. What it generally means is this: it is actually the part of two words, two Greek words. First, *phileo*, which means the idea of love and affection towards those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, where there is a kinship with those who are connected to you, because they share the faith in the lord Jesus Christ with you. It is the idea of love and affection for those who are with you in the body of Christ, *phileo*.

But it also has this other word, this second word, *xenia*, which is the word for stranger. Thus when we hear the word *hospitality* given to us in the New Testament, it contains both. It means to be able to make room, to show grace, brotherly love, and kindness towards others, which may be someone who is strange to you. It doesn't mean that it is literally someone off the street, though it certainly contains that. But it also means to others within the body of Christ who you do not know. This idea of showing brotherly kindness, drawing them close, making room at the table for those that you do not know.

And what's interesting is the English word *hospitality*, generally speaking, tends to draw most of its modern understanding and tracing it through the Latin root as opposed to the Greek root, those there is crossover between the two. Now, this idea of hospitality from the Latin means this. It actually has the word *hospice* or, in the feminine, it means *hospital*. So if you are thinking *hospital*, don't get ahead of me. Wait. That's not where it started.

The word *hospice* has had, as one writer said, a very checkered past, which is why we ought to pay attention to the words that we use and understand that many of the words that we use have gone through the washing machine of culture and time and have changed, taken on the dyes and other colors of different cultures, and come to us in different ways. This idea of *hospice* or *hospitality* does have this idea in it from which we get the English word, literally, a hospice—a place where one can find, who is a sojourner, a place to rest your head. Or hostile, which also carries the same idea, which we also get the word *hotel*—which we also get the word *host*. That has always had this idea embedded in it: the extension of care to another person. Not always tied to those who are in the faith with you or by kinship, but literally the sojourner or the exhile who is traveling through your town.

Now, what's interesting is, however, that there is another word which began to corrupt our understanding of hospitality. It is the Latin word *hostice*. Now, the Latin word *hostice* used to mean "stranger." However, over time, the word *hostice* which became corrupted with *hospitality* also gave to us another series of words, *hostile* being one of those. So therefore, over time, etymologically, it went through the washing machine. And so the idea of *hostice* meaning stranger became someone who was hostile, someone who became your enemy. So over time the whole idea of otherness, someone who was a stranger to you, often had in it embedded within it, whether we knew it or not, even subconsciously, this idea of "I ought to be and perhaps might be threatened by the stranger-ness of the stranger. Might they be hostile to me?"

And so over time, the idea of hospitality became corrupted with hostility, so therefore hospitality became associated with only offering space for those who you knew, those who are kins, those who might be your friends. So therefore, offering space to someone who might be, though you are not sure, someone who might be hostile to you, someone who is completely stranger or other to you, became very foreign. However, the fact that you are sitting in these seats this morning, regardless of whether you are a Christian or not—new Christian or a longtime Christian—you are here because in the early church, people went against the culture and instead of seeing offering hospitality only to friends, they took the risk of offering space to those who were strangers. The Christian faith flourished through a series of people surrounding the Mediterranean world who opened up their homes to those who were exiles and strangers, and the gospel was preached. It was shared. Therefore, the gospel grew through the early church practice of hospitality. Because at the heart of Christianity is embedded this whole idea of otherness. I'll be unpacking that a little bit later.

But it's important for us to know the history of these words. It is important for us to begin to recover and even be willing to take our modern cultural understanding of luxury and coziness and tea parties and the like—which are fine—but be willing to take it to the washing machine of the word and bring out of it a renewed sense and renewed practice of hospitality, recognizing that hospitality is, yes, a willingness to keep room at your dinner table and provide food for others. But it also means sharing one's life, what you most deeply believe, what you hold true, your convictions. Because those who sit at our tables need more than food for their bellies and drinks for their throats. We also need the sustenance of sharing our lives with one another.

And when we share our testimony of what God is doing, where we are struggling, our need for grace, our need for mercy, and allowing our lives to be broken open for others, we begin to recognize something that is profoundly human, that goes beyond bread and water. We need other human beings, and they need us. So hospitality is not just about tea and crumpets, which is great. I don't even know what a crumpet is, but it's probably a scone, some English scone or so forth. And we need fried chicken and mashed potatoes. I love that too. And we all enjoy—well, I enjoy sweet tea. Maybe you don't. But I love all of these things. But what we often need and what I'm most affected by is when our lives begin to be shared with others, and others share their lives with us. Hospitality, we begin to see, is actually at the heart of Christianity.

And isn't it ironic that it's Peter who would tell us, "Practice and show hospitality to one another without grumbling"? Do you know why it's ironic? Wasn't it Peter that Paul had to confront because he was acting one way before the Jews and another way before the Gentiles? When the Gentiles showed up, hey, things got awkward. When the Jews showed up and he was with the Gentiles, things got really awkward. And what did Paul say to him? You are not living in line with the gospel. What is Paul telling us? He's asking us to open the imaginations of our minds and our hearts to see that to live in line with the gospel is to see that it is God who is other, who did not need us, but made us and has welcomed us in as those who were once strangers. And he's drawn us close. He's given us more than food and drink; he's given us his life. Do you see? And so for Peter, being confronted with the heart of the gospel, being called back in line with the gospel, is now saying to the church surrounding the modern area of Turkey and now

says to us by extension of the church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages: “Practice hospitality without grumbling.”

So that moves us to the second point: from the heart. You can show hospitality. You can throw really good parties. But you can also be deeply cynical, and you can also be deeply narcissistic and selfish for the reasons why we practice such things. “I’m doing it because it’s expected of me.” “I’m doing it because I want others to think better of me.” “I want to do this because of what I might gain from these relationships.” But what begins to happen if we’re not careful—we begin to see hospitality as a burden, something we have to do. So therefore we begin to veer over into the area of, “Fine.” And I understand that. I’ll tell you as a pastor, there have been seasons in my ministry where I felt the white hot light of expectation. We have had many people into our home, but I will tell you as a pastor and his family how overwhelming it is to look over a sea of people every Sunday and imagine, “How do we even begin to offer welcome?” And it goes from being overwhelming for some to feeling like a duty. This is not what Peter desires. It is not what is most helpful.

And I will tell you, if we see it as other than what it is, that’s when it becomes something that feels like a duty. But if we renew the practice of hospitality as recognizing that it’s the sharing of our lives more than it is the sharing of a meal, then it becomes something completely different. It has the opportunity to become something completely different. Because it is meant to be something that is filled with gratitude. I am thankful for what I have received from the Lord, and I want to share it with you. Now, think of it, when we say, “I am grateful for what I have received from the Lord,” that’s not about meals or drinks. I’m thankful that I’ve received his Spirit. I’m thankful that I’ve received forgiveness and mercy.

Therefore, hospitality can take on a whole host of different ways of doing things. This can begin to break out if we begin to think about it. If you’re in a community group, or you’re a community group leader, think about this. If you see community group gatherings as simply Bible study stations, perhaps you might be missing a place where hospitality and gratitude can be shared. It doesn’t mean you have to put on a three-course meal. It could be as simple as crackers and cheese and water, or cookies. It doesn’t matter. But what’s interesting is that when we begin to share food and drink and begin to share our lives together as we come to the Word, which is important—but I want to say, in our community group gatherings, studying the Word is not even the most important thing that we do. It’s a part of what we do. But it’s a part of sharing our lives together. And that can be a form of hospitality is sharing, a place where we begin to say—what if at your next community group meeting, everybody took an opportunity to say what are two things over this last month that you can say you are grateful for? And watch what begins to happen as people begin to share their lives. And it will—it can have the opportunity—it can be very helpful for when you open the Word together. I’ve seen it happen. Could that be helpful for us?

But I recognize there is a very practical issue here. There is the practical issue of capacity and boundaries. You can’t entertain everyone, nor can we. You can’t bring everyone into your home and share your life with everybody. There are boundaries. There are capacity issues. But I want us to consider for just a moment, what would it look like if we don’t go to those questions first?

Now, capacity is more than just, “Do I have the ability to feed other people?” It’s time. It’s energy. It’s all of that. And those of you who have people in your home and who share fellowship in different ways—you know, it takes a lot of energy. And in our day, and in our fast-pace where our lives are full of screens, emails, tweets, and the like, when you get home, it’s just, *whew*. And the idea of having people and being in people’s lives, whether it’s in your house or somebody else’s can be very, very taxing, can it not? It can.

We do have capacity issues that are very real, and we ought to consider those with discernment and wisdom. But I want to invite us into what that discernment and wisdom, practically speaking, might look like. There’s a wonderful passage in 2 Corinthians 9, and I commend this to you for consideration that it might be a helpful way of praying through what it might look like, asking for the Lord’s help in

terms of capacity and boundaries. Now, in this passage, Paul is talking about giving as we worship together. But he's speaking to the Corinthian church. So they had issues more than just giving financially to one another; they also had real issues at the table with each other. The have's had what they had, and the have not's kept to where they were. They were not sharing hospitality with one another, and Paul was encouraging and inviting them into the heart of the gospel to share. And he begins to speak about generosity.

And then, right in the middle of the passage, what you will hear—it is a pathway, a channel, through which each of us can begin praying about gratitude and our capacity for showing hospitality to one another. He says:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

[2 Corinthians 9:6-11, ESV]

If you are tired with me, say *amen*. Are you not tired? Are you not weary? I want to invite you, dear brothers and sisters—this is not meant to be a burden, but it is God inviting us to his heart and saying, “Are you weary? Do you feel as though you have scarce resources of energy and time or food or drink? Okay. Come to me. Ask, and I tell you, I will give you what you need, and I will enable grace to abound to you so that you will have what you need that you might abound in generosity towards others.” He doesn't say in some circumstances, but he says in *all*.

So what would it look like collectively for us as a church, collectively for our community groups, to begin to say, “Lord, give us, we pray by your Spirit, give us the grace we need, the grace of capacity, the grace of energy, the grace of openness, that we might see you superabounding your grace, that generosity might flow.” And let God do that work. This is not meant to be a burden of something you have to do. Rather, he's inviting you into his heart to show you what he does. He's not saying, “Hey, you're saved, now go do it.” He's saying, “My Son has died for you. Welcome. I will give you grace to welcome others.” What would it look like for us to pray that? What would it look like for us as a church—“Lord, give us grace to invite all those who want to learn English, who need fellowship?” What would it look like for our community groups and our homes to come alongside Kory Twit to say—what would it look like for us to provide a meal or a place or a sharing with those, the nations, who come to our basement each week to learn English? These are just some of the ideas.

But we can't start by doing; we can start by being. Lord, have mercy upon me, for I am weak. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and I don't know where I'm going to get what I need to do this, but I come to you. Lord, give me grace. And let the Lord multiply his grace through you. This is not about health and wealth gospel. This is about God's promise. For as I've used the image before, we were never meant to be glass receptacles of God's grace where the world sits around and says, “Huh, that's really beautiful. Look at that water. It's really crystal clear.” No, God's grace pours out into the church of Jesus Christ like a colander, and it flows out through a thousand, million different holes. Because the source of

the water isn't ours; it's his. His grace will never run out. We are simply the ehilces through which it flows. We become the hands and feet of Christ. But it begins by saying, "Lord, I am weary. Lord, I am tired. Give me grace."

But therein lies the mystery, friends. Therein lies the mystery. And for a moment, I want you to, if you can wake up, if you need to shake off the sleepiness, do so. I want to invite you to see something with me that opens up the entirety of all of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Are you ready? Let's do this together. It is not too strong to say that hospitality, making room, welcoming in, are metaphors for the heart and blood of the gospel. Hospitality, making room, welcoming in—is at the heart of the gospel. Beginning in Genesis, God made the garden. He made all things that are visible, and he said, "They are all good." And then he made Adam and Eve, and he said, "Let's make man in our image." God is a community. A Trinity. He invited and made us into a community. He said, "All, very good." And then he gave them a garden. So God created room, he created us, and he said, "Welcome. Now, have dominion and follow in my ways."

We know the rest of the story. Adam and Eve did not follow in his ways, and they fell from that relationship, that beauty, that intimacy with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But even as they fell in sin, God made a plan. And he said in Genesis 3:15, "The seed of the woman," singular, masculine, "The seed of the woman," looking forth to Jesus Christ, "will crush his head, but he will bruise his heel." Speaking—he will crush the head of Satan, but Satan will bruise his heel. Do you know what he's saying? That is an invitation to what God is getting ready to do. And when we read of Psalm 23 this morning, which Pastor Mayfield will be preaching from this evening, he says through the psalmist, "Before mine enemies, I make a table."

And then Jesus Christ at the cross—what did he do? Jesus Christ made room for you and me before he judged us. Before one of our days came to be, God, through his Son, on the cross, made room: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He was welcoming us in. And he then used the beauty and symbols of bread and wine to represent what he's doing. "Take and eat." Do you see? Take and drink? As God made a garden for those he created yet they rejected him, he came in the garden of Gethsemane and told his Son, "This is my will, that on the Golgotha, on the mountain of skulls, you will make room, and your body and your blood will be an invitation to the world: 'Come, take, and eat. Without money, buy. Come.'" And as Paul says in Romans 4:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
[Romans 5:7-10, ESV]

Jesus and the cross become the channel through whom—no one comes unto the Father except through him. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is God's invitation to come.

But then, finally, not only do we see it in the garden, not only do we see it at the cross—we also see it at the restoration of all things. Jesus says this when he says to his disciples as they were concerned and worried about his departure from them going to the cross—he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would not have told you I am going there to prepare a place for you." What will that house look like? It's a metaphor. What does that house look like? Well, John tells us at the end of his letter, Revelation. And in it we hear these words, chapter 19:4-9.

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." [Revelation 19:4-9, ESV]

He says, "Say to them, 'Write it down.' Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper, to the table, surrounded by the elders and the angels singing 'Hallelujah! Our Lord reigns.'" These are the true words of God.

So, ladies and gentlemen, let me invite you in to see from Genesis to Revelation the gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ—it's that despite our sin, God has welcomed us in and has made room through his Son. It is Jesus who shows us how grace, hospitality, and sacrifice all intertwine together into the tapestry of God's love to us. May God in his grace give us grace—the grace of energy and time, expanding our boundaries, that we might be the hands and feet of Christ. Because we have been shown his grace, and room has been made at the table. May God's grace flow through us so that hospitality isn't something we have to do. Oh Lord, may it become something we *get* to do, because you have made room for us. Let's pray.

Now, oh Lord, as you have shown us the power and beauty of your Word, I pray that you would make us a people—though our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak, I pray that you would work in us grace, superabounding grace, that grace would flow from us through generosity. Lord, we pray that Columbia Presbyterian Church would stand in the line of all the history of your church to be a place of grace and of making room, of hospitality for others, that we would show brotherly love and kindness, because you have shown us who were once your enemies, who were once strangers without a home—you have welcome us in. Through our Savior who had no place to lay his head, you have given us more than a place to lay our heads; you have given us the grace of salvation. But Lord, we ask that it would not be an abstract thing, but enable us to live it out for the glory of your name, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.