

Radical Hospitality Revised 2017
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 West Valley Presbyterian Church
 September 24, 2017

Today we are talking about core value #2. Radical Hospitality. Lets say this together:

Radical Hospitality is GRACE BASED, LOVE LACED and HOPE FACED

One of the greatest classic stories about radical hospitality the way the gospel portrays it, is the opening part of Victory Hugo very LONG 1550 page novel written in 1862 called Les Miserables

This novel became an instant hit in France and around the world – because it was written to prick people’s consciences at that time with regard to the plight of the poor...

Victor Hugo became an immediate hero after this story was written, so much so that when he died 3 million people came out on the streets of France to commemorate his death

If you know the story

You know that it is very moving, and it is hard to keep a dry eye

In fact we’ve seen the musical rendition of it several times in New York and here in SF

And each time there has been a standing ovation...people yelling BRAVO!

And as I see people stand at the end of this story...clapping their hands and shouting BRAVO

All I can think of is the fact that this novel and musical are so successful because its the story of the truth of the radical hospitality of the gospel

Whether people know it or not, they are saying BRAVO to the reality of who God is for us in Jesus Christ – **A Radically Hospitable God**

Now in case you don’t know the story, I am going to just tell you the first part this morning

The novel begins in 1795 during the French Revolution and there is poverty everywhere

Jean Valjean is the main character

And he is trying to help his sister who has seven small children to feed

And he works wherever he can...but then there comes a very severe winter when no matter how hard he tries he can't get a job
There's no food in the house, the children are hungry

So on a cold dark night Jean Valjean goes out to a bakery, breaks a window, and steals a loaf of bread
AND...he gets caught
He is sentenced to five years hard labor...and then because he tries several times to escape unsuccessfully...his sentence increases and he then has stay in the prison for 19 years.

His name is taken away from him...he is known only by his number 24601

And when he is finally released he is 44 years old, and he carries papers with him that identify him as a felon
Well, he soon finds out that having to carry around papers like that isn't really freedom at all; no one will hire, and even the innkeeper won't let him have a room...

So on the first night that he is released
He is getting ready to sleep on a park bench
And someone comes over to him and says
"You know...there is one place that will take you in. The Bishop over there, he is a kind man, and he will give you something to eat and a bed for the night."
So Jean Valjean goes to the Bishop's house, exhausted, hungry, knocks on the door
And when the Bishop answers the door, he greets him with a smile and he Welcomes him in eagerly; happily
Feeds him a good meal...converses with him as a friend
And then offers him a bed for the night.
Jean Valjean takes it gladly because he is exhausted....and he has nowhere else to go

Well, in the middle of the night Jean Valjean wakes up and realizes his situation is hopeless.
That he has been branded a criminal for life; and if he is branded that...he might as well be that
So he sneaks down into the Bishops kitchen; and he begins putting all of the bishops silver spoons into a bag...if he was called a thief, he would be a thief....
And as he is doing all this, the bishop comes downstairs and sees what is going on
But Jean Valjean hauls back and strikes him in the side of the head
And the bishop crumples to the ground...
Jean Valjean with the stolen silver ...runs out into the night

Now what happens next is that of course he is caught by the police...
And the clip I am going to show you is from the movie Les Miserables...when the police bring Jean Valjean back to the bishop...cuffed as a prisoner again... watch what happens....

(VIDEO CLIP - <https://youtu.be/z9GtPqdtcc>)

Do you see the gospel in this story?
 How can you miss it?
 The Bishop had been beaten and robbed
 He has every right to inflict the harshest possible sentence
 And yet, he not only tells the police that YES...the spoons were a gift from him to
 Jean Valjean...he adds the candlesticks in as well
 Wait...you've forgotten these
 And then he says "I've bought your soul for God"

You see the only possible way that transformation can happen in a human life
 Is when we continue to return evil for good – no matter what!
 We turn the other cheek, when someone asks for our coat we give him our cloak as
 well
 When someone steals our silver, we give him the candlesticks as well
 The world says "You get even...you get ahead."
 Jesus says, "Bless instead of curse."

And Jean Valjean lives out his days as the story continues
 Knowing that he is a redeemed man; his freedom has been purchased with a price
 And he lives differently because of it; he becomes someone who shows mercy and
 changes lives around him because of it...and the rest of the story is all about what
 transpires...

As Christians, we've been bought with a price;
 It wasn't just candlesticks or silver that bought us our salvation – the forgiveness of
 our sins
 It was the death of Jesus Christ...
 And we are meant to look at the cross and say
 "Because of that cross, I am going to live differently. It's going to have an impact on
 my life; because I didn't deserve any of it – I ought to be in bondage... and I am so
 grateful for my freedom and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ that everything I do will
 be done to live out the Radical Hospitality that has been shown to me..."

In the scripture this morning we get a glimpse of this Radical Undeserved
 Hospitality that God has for usPaul writes,

**"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for
 the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a
 good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his
 own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us."**

Romans 4:6-8

Think of the bishop. See him again shoving those candlesticks into Jean Valjean's bag... Then multiply this radical hospitality and undeserved grace, a thousand times a thousand and you might just get a glimpse of God's love for you and unmerited grace in Jesus Christ.

Its so hard for us to grasp hold of who God is for us in this way because the world is so opposite of Gods radically hospitable nature; the world is competitive, cut throat, and you've got to earn everything you've got. If you hurt me, I'll hurt you back. That's the way the world is.

Mom has two children in another room, a baby and a five-year-old kid named Sean. And she hears a scream. And so she says, "Sean, what's going on in there?" Now how does every child in the world respond to that question?

"Nothing."

"Sean, something's going on. What's going on?"

Sean says, "The baby just pulled my hair. And it makes me really mad. I'm going to let him have it."

Mom says, "No, Sean, you have to understand the baby doesn't know. The baby doesn't understand how bad it hurts when somebody pulls somebody else's hair. The baby doesn't know."

Five seconds later there's another scream. "Sean, what's going on in there?"

"Now the baby knows."

Think about that one for just a moment. We live in a world where you pull my hair; I'll pull your hair.

God isn't like that....

Right before he is to die in fact, right before he is going to go to the cross and buy our freedom...ransom our souls from evil... Jesus has these remarkable words of radical hospitality for the disciples...

Remember...these are his friends who are about to deny him and abandon him in his death...Jesus knows this...But that night..Jesus also knows that they are worried and concerned, cause they can sense that something dark is about to happen...And Jesus says...

“Do not let your hearts be troubled...Believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.” John 14:1-3

That's the light at the end of the dark tunnel of the cross, friends...Jesus is saying to them. I am willing to give my all... to buy you back, redeem your life with my life, so we can be together forever. There is no greater radical hospitality than that....

It is grace based (undeserved)

Love laced (to the death)

And hope faced (God's hope of a relationship with us undergirds it all)

So what does this mean for us as a church? How do we live out this Divine Radical Hospitality?

First of all, we can all agree with this.

It's a nice sermon topic – hospitality

It's not like preaching on Revelation, or why God lets evil happen in the world.

Hospitality is an easy topic. We all like the concept

But until we DO something radical to make radical hospitality a reality in our lives – just like the Bishop

Nothing is really going to change

One of the reasons I used the story of Jean Valjean is because of the meaning of the word hospitality in scripture.

The word for hospitality in the Bible is **Philoxenia**. And what do you think Philoxenia means?

It literally means **LOVE FOR THE STRANGER**

Biblical hospitality has nothing to do with having dinner with our friends

Although that's okay, and we need that, it is completely different from Biblical hospitality.

Hospitality means opening the doors of our hearts and homes to people we don't know;

Maybe in a small town where everyone knows everyone else this would be a hard thing to pull off.

But here? In Cupertino? Is there anyone you don't know? Is there anyone who might be here from a different culture, or have a different religion, or might feel lonely here in the US?

We live in area where it is easy to find the stranger, and to

Offer them grace upon grace

I am just as guilty as anyone of continuing to “hang” with the people I know, and not making that extra effort to open up to the stranger...the person I don't know.

So I am preaching to myself – and you can listen if you want to - but I am telling you figuring all this out has reminded me yet again of how important this is...

To Move out of my comfort zone and make more room for the stranger in my life.

And every time I have done this, I have been so blessed!

(John Stones Inn)

And something else that is really crucial to get... .

And we are going to go into more detail on this in the second hour Adult Ed class afterward...so please come because this is a vital part of who we want to be as a church and I want everyone to understand it...so come if you can after worship... and participate

But like it or not...the thing that is really important to get is this.

Biblical Hospitality (love for the stranger) is NOT just a suggestion in scripture. It is a command!

It has been a command since Old Testament times when God told the Hebrew people...don't just harvest your grain for yourselves! When you harvest a field leave some of the grain on the edges for the stranger.

What a radical thing to say to people who were not supposed to associate with non-Jews.

Leave grain for the Gentiles? Well, I guess so.

And then you've got this great Old Testament scripture in Leviticus...that says...

'When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33-34

Many people say "Well you have the gift of hospitality and I don't".

That's a cop out. That's like saying, "Well you have the gift of loving other people and I don't."

Again, as I said, this love for the stranger is a command. We must do it. It is not optional.

It doesn't mean I have to be able have a four course meal and a meticulous home. It can be as simple as throwing a sheet over a ping pong table in the church hall, like my friend did for a bunch of kids who just randomly showed up one day at church, and spending some time chowing down on take out food and getting to know one another.

In order to reach out and be radically hospitable to the stranger we must put the transformation of other people's lives ahead of our own comfort zone, our own desires and our own routine.

That isn't easy. But,

that's what churches who practice radical hospitality do.

They do unexpected things that break set...that break the mold (the way things have always been done...) just like the bishop in the story who transformed Jean Valjeans life by giving him the candlesticks...THIS WAS NOT WHAT ANYONE EXPECTED.....

Churches that practice radical hospitality surprise people with grace - grace based...they love on people - love laced, and they do it with the hope faced expectation that people will get a glimpse of the love of Jesus as they live this out.

In one church that had RH as its core value..., a new Mom – a stranger to the church – came in one morning with her baby. The baby was fussing in the back pew. An usher went over to the Mom. Do you know we have a nursery? he asked very gently. “Yes”, said the Mom, “but because my son was born prematurely I don’t want to expose him to other children quite yet.” The usher nodded. The next Sunday when the Mom arrived with her infant, the usher welcomed her warmly. Look! he said. The ushers all got together, and purchased a rocking chair just for you. This way you can sit here in the aisle and rock your infant. We thought it might be a comfort to him. And if he fusses, don’t worry. We love children.”

WOW!

In another church, a new couple came in with two sets of young twins..Each set was only a year apart and all four children left midway in the service to go to Sunday School

This young couple sat next to an older couple and described to them how difficult it was to have had four children in three years. The response of the older couple was not just sympathy – Oh, I’ll pray for you...

They actually went out and created a support group for these parents by finding three other couples who had two sets of twins as well. Then they opened the group up to the community and it was a great success as several other couples joined in.

Both these families were strangers – walking in to an unknown church.

And they became involved in the life of faith in Jesus Christ.

Why? Because this kind of RH changes lives, because people can then begin to see what God is really like through you; and then they start to think, ..

If someone would go out of their way for me like that...care about me that much...invite, welcome, and include me so completely...

Maybe there is something about God that I want. Maybe I do need a relationship with a community that loves me and cares for me.

Maybe I do want to get to know God in a personal way after all...maybe this is a good place for my children to grow up...maybe there is hope...forgiveness...a chance to live fulfilled with purpose and meaning outside of the empty impersonal ratrace of our culture...maybe there’s something more...

What could happen do you think if we lived Radical Hospitality every day? Or even...

What could happen in this church...if every time we came here to worship, Radical Hospitality was on our mind, and we thought to ourselves,

“What is one way that I can break set and tangibly invite, welcome or include someone who needs it today?”

“What is one unexpected thing I can do that will surprise someone with the magnitude of the love of God for them?”

Let's say it again together: **Radical hospitality is grace based, love laced, and hope faced**....It is the very essence of the Christian community – the expression of the gospel. May we be faithful to live it out, today and everyday. Amen