

PARTNERS IN
the spirit
SEPTEMBER 2005



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Hospitality:
Growing Together; Discovering Each Other's Needs

Age-old Bible stories ... told in exciting and different ways

Building a Computer Room

Science, Education and Faith: A Debatable Trinity

Operation Book Bag 2005

World Hunger Auction

Hospitality: Growing Together;
Discovering Each Other's Needs



Sermon preached by Pastor President Alan Eldrid at the Friday evening service at the 2005 synod assembly

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it... Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:1-2,5-16)



It's a beautiful reading [from Hebrews], and I was told I only have five or perhaps two minutes extra to have a reflection on this. So I wondered what part of it we could focus on.

Thinking especially of the relationship that our churches have, I think the first verses about hospitality would be really interesting to talk about. Hospitality is one of the very, very old traditions that we inherited through the customs that came to the people of Israel in the desert. We also have it in our Christian tradition, but it comes from times when hospitality was very, very important. If you're crossing a desert and the people you meet don't receive you, if they don't share their water, their food, the shade, well, you won't succeed, you won't get across. So hospitality was really important for life.

On the other hand, we also have to think, "What does it mean to us nowadays?"

I heard once an interesting little story that a member of my parish was using at a workshop. In this small jungle there was this little monkey playing near the river on the branches that overhang the water. You know in general monkeys can't swim because they become wet and they go underwater. All the elder monkeys of the community had said, "You must be very, very careful of the river, because if you fall in there you'll surely drown."

But the young, little monkey was having a very good time playing in the branches until suddenly he slips down into the water. Finally, and with a lot of effort, he was able to get hold of some roots and get out of that river where he had nearly drowned.

While he sat there on the bank dripping water, he really started to reflect on the teachings of the elders—how important they were. (We normally learn things that way.) The little monkey has the feeling that he must do something for the rest in the jungle. He starts looking and he says, "I'll do my good deed of the day." So he starts putting his hands into the water and taking out all the little fish and putting them on the river bank so they wouldn't drown as he had nearly drowned.

You know that what is good for some is not good for others. Hospitality is not necessarily what we think is best for others;

we have to learn what others need. Hospitality is growing together and discovering the needs of others. Well, if not, we do what this very well-intentioned ape was doing – saving the fishes from the river. And, of course, condemning them to die on the riverbank.

In this relationship, our churches build together, framed in this great space of the grace of our Lord. This that we build together doesn't have on the other side of it the instructions on how to go about building it. We have guidelines, we have ideas, we share the experience, we grow together, we build bridges. But (this is the important part) it's a process that we must do together.

We mustn't sort of beforehand work out what others need. People in Argentina need to learn this also. Many people in our country they think it's great that people come from other parts of the world. Then the people who come over get the mate shoved in their faces. Mate is this Argentine drink where there is one straw and everybody sucks from the same straw. For most people that come over this is quite disgusting; for Argentines, if you're given mate, that's the greatest thing.

All these things that are part of culture, part of the way we see life, must be built into this understanding of hospitality that goes and comes and grows together. The reading [from Hebrews], this beautiful reading we have shared today, stresses this. In this discovering each other, I am sure that we share the presence of angels as the reading said. The most important part is that, in this reciprocal hospitality, we share the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, getting to know each other, getting to understand one another, and then being able to serve one another in this process.

Let God bless us and keep us all. Amen