It has been 9 ½ months since I began my work as Interim Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church. From day one we have been working together to discern God’s vision for this congregation as it moves forward and to seek a new pastor to lead you into that vision. With the input of many members of you, we developed five areas of emphasis for the future. And the Transition team has woven those five areas into this vision statement:

This morning we begin a five week sermon series titled Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations. It is based on a series of congregational resources developed by a Methodist minister named Robert Schnase. The scriptural foundation for this resource is John 15:8: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” Schnase describes five areas of ministry that are primary areas of focus for dynamic and healthy congregations. They are: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development; Risk-taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity.

Today we take a look at Radical Hospitality. And to do so I would like to ask two questions:

1. What is hospitality?
2. What is radical hospitality?

What does the word hospitality mean to you?

Hospitality is both an activity and a mindset in which one welcomes or entertains guests. We serve as hosts when we invite others into a common experience with the intention of it being a welcoming experience.

What is Christian hospitality? We see examples and statements of hospitality throughout the New Testament. Jesus says in Matthew: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me….Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:35; 40). Paul says to the followers of Christ in Rome that they are to practice an active hospitality: “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). In the book of Hebrews we read: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2)

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus offers all kinds of hospitality when he welcomes the sinners, those with illnesses and diseases of all kinds, those who are marginalized for all kinds of social and religious purposes, and says to them, you are welcome. He invites them into God’s circle of care.
We need go no further than our Gospel lesson for today to see an example of this kind of hospitality. While the disciples are arguing who among them is the greatest, Jesus takes a child into his arms and says:

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:37)

It is a gesture of welcoming that shows the worth of an individual who represents those who are often of the fringes of society. Children had no power or prestige or wealth.

Schnase writes that:

“Hospitality is a mark of Christian discipleship, a quality of Christian community, a concrete expression of commitment to grow in Christ-likeness by seeing ourselves as part of the community of faith, “not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). By practicing hospitality, we become part of God’s invitation to new life, showing people that God in Christ values them and loves them.” (Radical Hospitality, p. 11)

Now we come to the third question: What is Radical Hospitality? What do you think of when you think of the word, radical?

The original definition of the word *radical* is “arising from the source or going to a root or source”. The word radiate is a related word and derives from the source Latin word *radicalis*. According to Schnase, *Christian hospitality is radical because it describes “practices that are rooted in the life of Christ and radiates into the lives of others”* (Radical Hospitality, p. 17).

He goes on to say that

*Radical can also mean “drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the norm”; and so provokes practices that exceed expectations, that go the second mile, that take welcoming the stranger the max. By radical, don’t think wild-eyed, out of control, or in your face. Instead, imagine people offering the absolute utmost of themselves, their creativity, their abilities, and their energy to offer the gracious invitation and reception of Christ to others.* (p. 17)

Schnase also argues that:

*Churches characterized by Radical Hospitality are not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving visitors warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. They desire to learn about inviting and welcoming more people and younger people and more diverse people into their congregation.* ( p. 17)

I would like to focus on to that one statement where Schnase says, that “congregations exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship in to a faith community” (p. 17). We can look at those without a faith community and say, “they don’t need or want what we have to offer.” But through the lens of Radical
Radical Hospitality

Hospitality, we understand that we do have what people need. I love this description offered by Schnase:

- **People need to know God loves them, that they are of supreme value, and that their life has significance.**
- **People need to know that they are not alone; that when they face life’s difficulties, they are surround by a community of grace; and that they do not have to figure out entirely for themselves how to cope with family tensions, self-doubts, periods of despair, economic reversal, and the temptations that hurt themselves or others.**
- **People need to know the peace that runs deeper than an absence of conflict, the hope that sustains them even through the most painful periods of grief, the sense of belonging that blesses them and stretches them out of their own preoccupations.**
- **People need to learn how to offer and accept forgiveness and how to serve and be served. As a school for love, the church becomes a congregation there people learn from one another how to love.**
- **People need to know that life is not having something to live on but something to live for, that live comes not from taking for oneself but giving of oneself.**
- **People need a sustaining sense of purpose. (p. 17)**

Radical Hospitality requires serious and thorough examination of what we do as a congregation to invite and to make the stranger feel welcome. It requires looking at everything through the eyes of the strangers.

Resource: