

Radical Hospitality – Receiving God's Grace
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The prophet Joel promised that when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh that young men will dream dreams and old men will have visions. I'm 47. I think that makes me a late dreamer with a premature vision.

I shared part of it with you last night – this dream, this vision; sixteen chairs in a circle suspended like a balcony for the communion of saints that gather whenever we do. The chairs are down to earth now and will soon be on the move. Sometimes I think they are more animated than we are.

Before I share the rest of the dream, the details of this vision - I think you should know one of the ideas woven through these chairs. Radical hospitality – that rare vintage of God's grace, comes from the opposite side, from the other. It comes from your enemy. Radical hospitality can't come from a friend or from someone who is like you. The hospitality you receive from the people who resemble you is nice, but there is nothing very radical about it. Radical hospitality must come from the other side – from those who are different: their theology, politics, ethnicity, nationality.

I think radical hospitality is what's being acted out in the story of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh and the disciples get it straight from the source. Single malt. They staggered out into the streets of Jerusalem and spilled their guts in story. It would have been regular hospitality if the story had been told in the disciple's native tongue of Aramaic. It wasn't. This was radical hospitality because the Elamites heard, Egyptians heard, Romans heard. These are all enemies. They are on opposite sides of the issues, opposite sides of the battlefield, but they heard the same invitation from the same God to join the same story. They came from different places, spoke different languages, had different words for *love*. We cannot afford to overlook what they share in common. They were all devout Jews living together in one place. Devout. Different.

There are sixteen chairs; sixteen stops on the color wheel. The back of each chair is inlaid with a nameplate. Cretans, Asians, Mesopotamians – these cultures, fifteen total, list every nation under heaven, according to Luke. One chair has a blank nameplate. There are two reasons why. Some culture had to have been left out. There have always been more than fifteen countries under the heavens. There have always been cracks large enough to swallow

an entire people. The chair with the blank nameplate is for the invisible cultures of the ancient world. They did not make the list and are missing from our collective memory but they still have a seat at this table.

You have the opportunity to participate in this vision, if you are so moved. Each of you has been given an envelope with two pieces of paper in it. One is a map of this table and the surrounding colored chairs. You will need that to find out who you are and where you sit. The other is a calling card bearing the name of one of the Pentecost peoples. I have divided you into sixteen groups, but you're all mixed together. You each belong to one of the sixteen countries and each country has its own chair. The calling card in your hand does not tell you which group you are in. It tells you who is sitting in the chair on the opposite side from you. In other words, the card you hold bears the name of the person who is your opposite, your enemy. Find out where they sit and your seat will be directly across.

I'll tell you this dream I had, this vision I carry, but first I want to say a little about color theory. Colors are like musical notes in that some combinations are more interesting than others. Complementary colors are any two colors that when placed side by side become brighter. Each color becomes more of what it is. Blue next to orange seems to be lit from behind. Orange is even more alive than before. Next to blue it pops. They are fine colors all by themselves but put them near each other and they are more. You can find a color's complement by looking to the opposite side of the color wheel. By the way, if you mix the two, you get something neutral – a muddy grey that is not very interesting.

And now to this dream I had, this vision. It may be absurd, but in my experience it is the absurd dreams that are the most interesting. It involves those who were the first to hear the story on Pentecost and it takes place in the Upper Room. I'm not sure where the disciples are – I'd like to think they're in the kitchen but I don't have that faith in them. It's five days after the Holy Spirit crashed in and became the life of the party. That was on a Sunday. This dream takes place on the first Sabbath after. For these devout Jews, Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday. Today is Friday – the first Friday after Pentecost, and we are just a few hours from sundown.

The guests began arriving just before sundown. A round table, painted like the earth, sat in the middle of the room surrounded by sixteen chairs. The air felt awkward to breathe. They came from different countries and spoke different languages. These were the first participants of Pentecost. A Cappadocian, a Parthian, a Median; they found their chairs and sat down.

She was the last to enter. The host. After lighting the candle, she prayed these words; "Blessed are You, Source of Life who has drawn us close to You in holiness through your commandments and commanded us to kindle the flame of Shabbat."

"Amen," they said.

The bread was broken, the cup was blessed and the story of exodus and wilderness was told.

She rose up out of her chair to speak again. "Something needs to be said. You all heard the story Sunday. It is our story. You heard it in the language your mother used when you were a child. You heard it in the language you use when you dream and when you cry. But something else needs to be said; she put both hands down on the table. She looked at the Judaeans; "You were not the only one who heard the story that day." She looked across the table. "And neither were you. You all heard it. You are all devoted to the same Source of Life. And yet you are at war with each other. You are at war with each other - something needs to be said."

She lifted a cup to her lips. The guests looked across the table and held the gaze of the one seated on the other side.

"The Lord is my shepherd, she sang, I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters. He restores." She caressed the blue of the table and took another drink of wine. "He makes me lie down in green." Keeping time, she tapped a verdant continent three times. Humming softly and then speaking again, "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My cup overflows." She stopped. Drank. And said, "Shalom Alechem. Peace be upon you." The Judaeans and the Arab looked at each other, and then back for the host. But she was gone. She was gone.

Devout and different and all living in the same place: Jews in the ancient world of Jerusalem and United Methodists in the post-modern world of Iowa. If you are in this room you have enemies. They are your opposite. What you believe – they don't. What they believe – you don't. It does not matter who you sit with, you can't help but think that the other half is destroying the church. Liberals, I know you do it. You think the church would be better off if the conservatives would just go away. It wouldn't be. First of all you are not that interesting by yourselves, and secondly, you would lose the part of the body that takes scripture and personal holiness seriously enough to try and change the way we live. Conservatives, I know you do it too. You think the church would be better off if the liberals would just go away. It wouldn't be. First of all you are not that interesting by yourselves, and secondly, you would lose the part of the body that takes scripture and social holiness seriously enough to try and change the way we live.

I said there are two reasons for a chair with a blank nameplate. The second is this: there are a few of you that don't fit in. You don't feel at home. Not here. A few of you feel your state, this state, is too liberal. A few of you feel your church, this church, has grown too conservative. You do not hear your native tongue, the tongue that reminds you who you are. You ache to hear the language you use when you dream, the language you reach for when you cry out in ecstasy and in pain. This building is huge, this body is huge and a few of you keep silent because you don't fit in. You don't have to say a word, but you fit in around this table. You have a seat at this table.

I will be deconstructing this circle in the days we have left. You will begin to see chairs, paired off in complimentary colors, placed around this space. They'll be set facing each other. Framed. Ready for use, ready for conversation. You all heard the same story. You are devoted to the same God. And yet you are at war with each other. Something needs to be said.

Find your chair. Sit down. Listen.

Amen

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