

I have been talking this past month on welcoming and I would like to take that one step further to the concept of radical hospitality

you know words take on different meanings in the way they are lived out in different groups and different cultures. Part of our culture is wikipedia and Hospitality according to Wikipedia

Hospitality “derives from the Latin hospes,[3] meaning "host", "guest", or “stranger”.” It is related to words like hospital and hospice. It implies not simply welcoming but a care that is deep and significant and is a two way street involving the host and the guest.

That much I knew before starting to craft this sermon but I also found out from Wikipedia that the latin word “Hospes is formed from hostis, which means "stranger" or "enemy" (the latter being where terms like "hostile" derive).”

In our UU faith we have many sources traditions that we draw on in our life as UUs. There is a strong history of hospitality in the Jewish tradition. In the Jewish scripture story after story of welcoming the stranger exists and Leviticus one of the Jewish books of laws proscribes “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you too were strangers in a strange land.”

Xty - In the New testament Paul instructs an early church to “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” the verse from Hebrews 13:2

There are many teachings in Islam and in the Koran on hospitality. The Jewish Christian and Islamic faiths all came out of a nomadic desert heritage. Hospitality was done not simply because it was nice but because it saved lives. And this was not necessarily altruistic. If I welcome you into my tent, feed you, protect you, give you water there may come a day when you will feed me, protect me give me water, or if not me then maybe my kin.

Buddhism, Hinduism teach of hospitality as do the earth based religions.

Earth based religions - they are varied and many and I am not an expert on them all nor do I have enough time to tease out the different faiths that all get put under the pagan umbrella but

Cat Chapin-Bishop, a Quaker Pagan writes “In the ancient world, [hospitality] meant something more.

In the world in which our ancestors lived and formed their values, there were no Sheratons or Motel 6’s dotting the landscape.

More, there were no well-organized authorities to turn to for basic safety in traveling. In the ancient world, there were only two ways to move from place to place and live to tell the tale: with an army at your back, or relying upon the hospitality of strangers.

Read more: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/quakerpagan/2012/06/pagan-values-hospitality-and-the-affordable-care-act.html#ixzz3E3VsanyE>

In our time in our American culture where Motel 6s and restaurants dot the landscape we have made a business of hospitality. What used to be a spiritual and communal practice with moral implications has now become the Hospitality industry.

And so we need a way to describe the hospitality I am talking about. A hospitality that is different than the industry - deeper challenging whose arc bends toward justice, and whose goal is not the bottom line. Radical Hospitality is what I am talking about.

Quinn Caldwell, pastor of Plymouth Church here in Syracuse, tells the story of a church member in his former church, Old South, in Boston. This church is located on Boylston street a place of high end stores, high end restaurants, and tourists. they had one member Bubbles was known to come to church in thigh high shiny red vinyl boots, or another week leopard print velvet mini dress, leather ,feathers, spike heel boots, silver lame. If you met her you would probably assume that she was a member of a profession that is very old, very hard and practiced at night you would be right. But Bubbles would talk to anyone over coffee at that church about how much church meant to her and how much the people meant to her and how important it was. She would welcome all with a message that said that particular congregation was just so welcoming to her. But Quinn tells also that the welcome the congregation gave her was slow to come.

When she first came to Old South Church she got the welcome that all people got but it was a bit hollow. Some of the smiles were painted on the handshakes a bit robotic. Often when she was asked How are you? That answer was “Tired I’ve been up all night and I need me some church.” There were raised eyebrows and even some jokes behind her back. Until one morning when Bubbles was leaving the church there was a group of members out on the street. Bubbles came out, crossed the street and two tourists looked at her and one said loud enough for Bubbles and the church folk to hear “Eww do you think she is working this early in the morning?” Word spread among the church members about this interchange. You know as a church they could have graciously shunned her - you know how that goes - we forget to tell someone when there is a change in meeting time - we stop making eye contact we don't talk directly to that person anymore. But no here is what happened at Old South. As the story got out about what had happened after church that morning folks there got a glimpse at what life is like for someone who lives at the margin of the world - and how the world, that is not constrained by some sense of called covenantal community, whose mission it is is to welcome, treats people. Church folks began to see how hard it was for someone like Bubbles.

And so that congregation continued to welcome Bubbles and after awhile she would find visitors at coffee hour greet them and bring them to Quinn saying “I just met Jose here and he is interested in our church so I thought maybe it would be good for him to talk to the pastor.” Bubbles the stranger, had become Bubbles the member who became Bubbles the welcomer both inside the church building and in the world beyond

We each are somewhere on that journey from visitor to belonging to sharing.

Old South’s story is not our story but it could be. We are a warm and welcoming group. But all groups, and this one is no different, have a limit to their welcome.

And by that I mean all groups have a way in which they are uncomfortable with a person that falls too far outside the norm of the community. I don't know where that limit is in this community because I am still getting to know us. But there is that line somewhere. For instance what would it be like for someone who was a creationist and did not believe in any form of evolution to be part of this congregation? I invite you to think about where the line is for you.

Radical Hospitality is not simply about welcoming or being really really friendly. It is more than wanting for folks to come to us so that we can welcome them.

Sister Simone Campbell who headed up the Nuns on the Bus tour, whose goal was to draw attention to some of the economic injustices of our time, was the Ware lecturer at our most recent General Assembly - the UUAs annual national meeting.

She talked about radical hospitality. She said "So I do this because of faith. I do this because I am challenged to radically accept everyone." She described faith as walking toward trouble. I love that description because for me faith is an action not a noun. And she talked about the action of faith.

It was a really amazing speech and moment. Here was a lifelong Catholic - solidly Catholic speaking to Unitarian Universalists and using words like faith. She brought a message of hope and tolerance that many of us do not expect to come from a leader in the Roman Catholic tradition.

But that was really her point. Radical Hospitality is not simply welcoming folks like us, people who think like us look like us spend money like us Sing like us.

Radical Hospitality is about welcoming all. That means going being being friendly

Nowadays radical hospitality also means going out to welcome people. We live in a broken world, or at least parts of it are broken. We have a message that the world needs - not only do we stand on the side of love we reach out in love. That was the theme of this past General Assembly and that was why Sister Simone was invited to speak, at least in part. We are a radically hospitable people and so we reach out in love, not in righteousness, not in a holier than thou attitude, not with vengeance, not in sarcasm, we reach out in love.

If you leave this place and are ready to reach out in love you will change the world. I don't mean that you will end hunger, or poverty, or systemic injustice. No one of us can do that alone. But ... Nasruddin showed up in old clothes and no one noticed him, then he came back in a new coat and he was the honored guest. It is old wisdom but deserves saying again - when we can look past someone's outside and welcome them in all that they are we change the world just a little.

But this faith of ours calls us nudges us pushes us to reach beyond the rabid individualism that exists in this culture, the constant me me me. Our faith calls us to reach out in love and draw people in as one way to heal the brokenness in this world. But how does that healing happen? I think that is where the story of the 12 inch fishing line comes in. Ann Lamott references the study - I could not verify that the study happened. But it made sense to me. It is so human to want, to need, the transitional object, or the habit that makes us feel secure.

When congregations, covenantal communities, reach out in love we give people a chance to try something new while giving them a rope to hang onto. And as we

practice in community as we reach out in love we will give the world a chance to be changed.

How will you reach out, How will you change the world?