

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

June 14, 2026 – 3RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/PROPER 6, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George–Hacker

Homily: *“To Welcome the Stranger is to Welcome God”*

Genesis 18:1-8	(Abraham gives hospitality to three strangers)
Psalms 100	(Serve the Lord with gladness; His mercy is everlasting)
Romans 5:1-8	(We are justified with God through faith)
St. Matthew 9:35—10:15	(Jesus sends the disciples out and warns of persecution)

The names Sodom and Gomorrah usually conjure up in most people's minds images of perversion and God's fiery anger rained down in judgement. This is understandable, because in the original story, which comes from the time of Abraham, it is the attempted violent sexual assault of a man that precipitates the destruction of the towns. However, contrary to the popular perception, of all the later references to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible, only one makes reference to the carnal nature of their sin. All other references to their sin speak of it in terms of injustice, and particularly of the failure to offer proper hospitality. The intended victim was a visitor to the town and the men of Sodom offered the very opposite of hospitality.¹

Today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew also illustrates for us the importance of hospitality. Jesus sends out His twelve disciples to preach the Good News and heal the sick, and He instructs them to stay in any town that welcomes them. But if they are not welcomed—if they are refused hospitality—they are to leave, shaking the dust off their feet, symbolically disassociating themselves from that town. Moreover, says Jesus, “Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of Judgement than for that town.” Why Sodom and Gomorrah? Because in Scripture they are the archetypal image of the people that failed to offer hospitality to strangers. And in refusing hospitality to the stranger, they were refusing hospitality to God.

Many of the laws given in the days of Moses related to the need to behave hospitably to both neighbor and stranger. In our day, hospitality is either an industry, or something that we offer to friends and those we want to impress. It's not something we would generally go out of our way to offer to strangers. There are exceptions in special circumstances, and sometimes our nation has even shown it on a grand scale. The welcome this country offered refugees in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did us proud. Whereas, the way we have subsequently responded to refugees from South and Central America, the Middle East, Afghanistan, or Iraq would have given Jesus every reason to shake the dust off His feet, erase our names from the maps, and leave us to a fate worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.

In our Old Testament reading, Abraham was the model of extravagant hospitality when the three strangers came his way. This story of the three strangers is the basis for depicting them as the Holy Trinity in certain icons. Abraham begged the trio to stay, offered them water with which to wash up, baked bread for them and killed the fatted calf. They were just passing through, but Abraham pleaded for the opportunity to offer them hospitality.

You can perhaps imagine what a different world we would live in if everyone was that eager to offer hospitality to one another—if, instead of regarding every stranger as a potential invader, as a suspicious threat to our property, our safety and our happiness, we regarded them as messengers of God. What if we considered their very strangeness as a source of new insights, new learning, and new wisdom to be shared with us, if only we would welcome them to stay long enough over a good meal and conversation? Think of the riches they might bring to that hospitality! What a wonderful world it would be, indeed.

However, the ultimate in hospitality is found in Jesus Christ, and can be tasted again every week at the Communion Table. In Jesus we see hospitality that embraces not only neighbor or stranger, but even enemies. And in Him, we see a hospitality that goes far beyond offering a washbasin and a towel, or good food and wine. For Jesus offers us *His own self, His very life*. Jesus went so far as to die for us so that we might be assured that we are loved and welcomed by God to His Banquet Table in Heaven.

Jesus could have kept quiet and saved His life. But no. He went on touching the untouchable, loving the unlovable, and proclaiming God's extravagant welcome to the poor, the broken, and the left out. It cost Jesus His life, but He wouldn't let that get in the way of welcoming us to His table.

As St. Paul said in our reading from Romans, just possibly you might imagine a person who would give up their life for someone really special, someone who'd truly earned it through their extraordinary goodness—say, Billy Graham or Mother Teresa. But, says Paul, God proves His love for us, in that while *we* were still sinners, when *we* had done nothing to deserve God's favor, Christ died for us.

God's offer of hospitality knows no limits. His invitation to eternal life through faith in Christ is for every single human being. And for those of us who are believers, we are embraced in the love of God, the eager host, who invites us to share in the Bread of Life and the Wine of Salvation. And, at times, we will stand before this Table with strangers to our left or right who may not be our brother or sister in Christ. However, we may discover that if we embrace what they have to say, they just might be messengers from heaven sent to bear us good news.

Steven Rhodes a Christian pastor and author, writes: "Hospitality, when you get right down to it, is unnatural. It is difficult to place others first, because our inclination is to take care of ourselves first. Hospitality takes courage. It takes a willingness to risk. But as our Lord reminds us, if we only love those who we are sure will love us and welcome those who will welcome us, then we have done little to share the love of God, for as Jesus says, even the heathen do that. You see, most of us know what true hospitality feels like. It means being received openly, warmly, freely, without any need to prove ourselves. Hospitality makes us feel worthy, because our host assumes we are worthy. This is the kind of hospitality that we have experienced from God, and all that God asks is that we go and do likewise, particularly to 'the alien among us.'"²

Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547 AD) was an Italian monk and the founder of the Order of Saint Benedict. He wrote a list of instructions and guidelines for his monastic community, known as the Rule of St. Benedict. The main theme in these instructions is hospitality. In the Middle Ages if you were poor, hurting, or on a journey, you would rejoice to see a Benedictine monastery because you knew they would give you shelter and welcome you.

One of the most important jobs in the monastery was the job of porter. He would sleep near the gates, in case a guest arrived in the middle of the night. And when a guest did arrive, according to the Rule of St. Benedict, the porter was to welcome that person as if he or she were Jesus Himself. The porter would exclaim, "Praise be to God," would ask for the guest's blessing, then bow down and kiss the person's feet, rejoicing that Jesus was there. Jesus had come in the form of this guest.³

That story leaves us with a lingering question: What would it be like if we welcomed every guest—in fact, every person we encounter—as if they were Jesus Himself?

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, thank You for the grace and welcome You have continually shown each and every one of us. Please help us to open our hearts, minds, and homes to others. Remove any fear, pride, or self-consciousness, and grant us generous spirits so that all who cross our path feel seen, accepted, valued, and loved. In Jesus' Name we pray.⁴ *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. Nathan Nettleton, "God's Hospitality," 15 June 2008, [OpenIconChurch](https://openicon.church/sermons/gods-hospitality/) <<https://openicon.church/sermons/gods-hospitality/>> 6 June 2026.

² Steven A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World*, (Downers Grove IL, InterVarsity Press, 1998) p. 135

³ Adapt. Geoff Helton, "The Virtue and Rule of Hospitality," 19 May 2026, [ThePastor'sWorkshop](https://thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations/the-virtue-and-rule-of-hospitality) <<https://thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations/the-virtue-and-rule-of-hospitality>> 8 June 2026.

⁴ Resources: Lynne Baab, *Praying About the Emotions of Hospitality, Resources for Personal Spirituality for Congregational Pastors*, 13 June 2023 [LynneBaab.com](https://www.lynnabaab.com) <<https://www.lynnabaab.com/blog/praying-about-the-emotions-of-hospitality>> and Megan Evans, "A Prayer to Grow in Hospitality," n.d. [Crosswalk.com](https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/your-daily-prayer/a-prayer-to-grow-in-hospitality.html) <<https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/your-daily-prayer/a-prayer-to-grow-in-hospitality.html>> 8 June 2026.