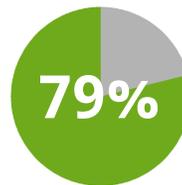


JOURNALS POSTED ON NOVEMBER 14, 2018

INTENTIONAL INVITATIONS



DAVID & JOYCE REED



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IBEROAMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Hospitality

In October I (David) traveled to Boston, Massachusetts. I—along with Missionaries Ray Schellenger and Walt White—had been invited to speak and lead workshops at the ABCMA Annual Mission Works Conference. It was a challenging three days with over 200 people and several other inspiring speakers.

The theme of this year's conference was "Hospitality." The Biblical word from which we derive hospitality is "Philo-xenia" which literally translates as "Love for Stranger." We looked closely and extensively at God's heart and Biblical hospitality. God extended love to us, as the great hymn sings - "Jesus sought me when a stranger" so ultimately we can and would do the same for others. Hospitality is an expression of God's heart and who God is. Hospitality is one of the greatest human needs in our world at a local and global level. My sharing here emerges from the conference, what happened when I returned home, and perceiving God's invitation.

Bodies in the Desert

The day after I arrived back home, October 21, was Immigrant Sunday at the church Joyce and I attend in Tucson. On the communion table were 122 rocks piled on top of each other. The rocks were a visible reminder of the bodies found in the Arizona desert in 2018. Each rock represented a person who died from exposure and/or lack of water while walking north from Mexico through the Sonoran desert. Seventeen of the rocks had names written on them. One-hundred and five of the rocks had "Desconocido" - Unknown. We remembered these people in prayer and then we carried these rocks—each representing a life—to an outside memorial garden where they were added to hundreds of others.

Who is my Neighbor?

A humanitarian group active in Tucson is called "Samaritanos." These Samaritans regularly hike into the desert wilderness of southern Arizona with bottles of water to leave along the trails for passing strangers. They often find bodies, too. ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency) hikes the same trails and will puncture the bottles when discovered. Life-saving water spilled into the ground....leaving behind the empty containers, greater desperation, profound hopelessness, and human lives in the balance. It stands in

contrast to our Biblical moral ethic to respect human life, to extend hospitality, to love the stranger among us, to regard our neighbor as self, and to care for those in need.

I do not seek to side-step or “sugar-coat” immigration. It is a complicated issue in our country but it is not my focus in this reflection. Rather, it is an example of what I believe is my struggle (and perhaps yours, too) with the kind of Hospitality God has extended to me and invites me to offer to others. In the middle of all this I wrestle with the thought that until I practice hospitality for my inner self, letting God into my deepest fears, hurts, needs, and all my imperfections, how can I extend it to the stranger? Where does my soul long for living water? How am I still a stranger to God?

Invitations

A new understanding of what “problem” means has been emerging inside me. I once looked at problems as something to be solved or resolved and often had the flavor of “either-or”. Today, however, problems, dilemmas, discomforts, struggles, questions and doubts have become more like invitations. And not just external “problems” but my interior struggles too.

The first Invitation is to become aware of my interior with open hospitality rather than judgement. God continues to love me with welcome rather than condemnation. The second invitation is to let go of my hard lines of certainty, my fears and angers, and allow God to transform my heart. This frees me. I’m no longer responsible for telling God whom to love or how to express that love. I’ve discovered the paradox that as I allow God to be infinitely greater than my convenience, comforts and constructs, God becomes more present, more intimate with me and through me, than ever before. God is always bigger than my constructs. My need for convenient and comfortable solutions to my “problems” can keep God pretty small and distant and certainly tends to keep my life with God on a more superficial level.

I am still holding the MA conference and what happened next with intention. I am aware that there is an invitation regarding hospitality that reaches deep into who I am in Christ. My invitation might be an attitude shift, some sort of activism, hospitality with a person I have not met, or to love others I already know with greater intention and

awareness. I don't know yet, so that's why I hold it with intention. I'm waiting. Expecting. But I do know whatever my invitation will be, I will recognize it as God-kingdom kind of love and hospitality. It will stretch me beyond myself and my comforts, will draw me deeper into who I am in God's heart, and allow God to be greater. If it does that, it will glorify God and not me.

Working on my Goaty-ness

Hospitality emerges from this central Christian command: Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love neighbor as self. It's weighty – all the law and the prophets hang in the balance. Maybe that's a weighty way of saying: "the integrity of God and God's people" hang on this love. Jesus said, "as you have done unto the least of these thirsty, sick, naked, or imprisoned; you have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:31ff). It's a dividing line between the sheep who enter God's kingdom and the goats who do not. I still need some grace work on my goaty-ness.

I pray my words and thoughts in this article might challenge you to think about God's invitation of Hospitality and the Kingdom of God kind of love as it applies to your heart, to situations in your life . . . one person, one stranger...one cup of water at a time. Happy Thanksgiving!

David and Joyce

P.S. Please pray for us from November 16-26. We will be traveling to Bulgaria and Northern Greece to offer spiritual formation and renewal to our missionary colleagues who serve in Europe and the Middle East. Twenty-two of us will be gathered in Kavala, Greece for four days over Thanksgiving. We are still teaching Spiritual Formation in Latin America, but International Ministries is inviting us to expand our ministry to other regions of the world. More to share in our next journal!