

Introduction:

- A. *“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”* Lk 2:7 It was no one’s fault. There just wasn’t any room. But it is a potent statement, nonetheless, that when the Son of God was born into this world there was no room for him. There was no one who showed hospitality to the Lord Jesus at his birth.
- B. Each Sunday during this season, Pastor Jamie and I are talking about the different kinds of gifts Christians can give. They are gifts unique to Christians, like last week when Jamie talked about giving forgiveness because we have been forgiven so much. Today my text I Heb. 13:2, *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”*
- C. The thought of hospitality to strangers is intimidating or unappealing to a lot of people. Ours is not a hospitable culture. We like our privacy. Or we’re put off by the thought of preparing a meal or carrying on a conversation with people we don’t know. Or we’re so busy, or we don’t feel we can add another relationship in our lives. Whatever the reason, if we are to be obedient Christians our reluctance is a problem because we have a direct command, *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers.”* **Are you willing to think about that with me today?**

Look again at **Heb. 13:1-2**, *“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers.”* The writer is speaking to Christians—to brothers and sisters in the Lord. Here’s an interesting thing that we can’t see in

our English translations. A literal translation would be: “*Let love for brothers continue. Do not neglect love for strangers.*” A Greek word for *love*—*phileo*—is in both part of both words: *philadelphia* and *philoxenia*. Love of brother and love of stranger. You’ve heard the word xenophobia, a *fear* of strangers. This is the opposite, a *love* of strangers. In this particular case, love for Christian strangers.

I. HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS IS A KEY MEASURE OF OUR LOVE FOR FELLOW BELIEVERS

- A. *Illus.*: When I was a freshman in high school, my mom got a call from Mrs. Viland, whom we didn’t know. She explained to my mom that her son Dave, who’d just graduated from high school, had gotten a job in Britton. Mrs. Viland had heard that we were Christians (it’s a small world out there!) and she wondered if we’d invite her son to church with us. Mom decided I’d make the invite. But this guy was *four years* older than me! And he lived in a rooming house. A rooming house! It was less than a block away but the thought of walking in there, and knocking on his door was really intimidating to me. It was with slow steps that I trudged those four doors down. I can’t remember how awkward that conversation was, but guess what? Dave came to church. And today he is one of my oldest friends.

This passage is like my mom. It puts its hand in our back and shoves us into two uncomfortable situations—loving strangers and, according to v.3, “*Continue to remember those in prison,*” (which we won’t deal with this morning.) These things call for a level of commitment to other Christians that pushes us out of our comfort zones.

- B. Both vv.2 and 3 are reminders: “*Do not forget,*” and “*Continue to remember.*” What does that tell you? It is

very easy to forget about the Christian strangers among us and persecuted Christians in bondage. Today we'll focus on the strangers among us. We simply don't see them. "Out of sight, out of mind." If we do see them, it doesn't occur to us that we have a responsibility to them.

- C. What does hospitality to strangers look like? It is simply befriending someone. Being kind. *Philo-xenia*, loving a stranger. Originally, this command probably had traveling believers in mind; Christians who came into a city knowing no one. What does hospitality today look like? Have them over. Invite them out for lunch. Ask if they'd like to meet for a walk. Ask if you can see their garden. Set up a play date with your kids and theirs.
- D. **If our church is to be home for people, we have to work at obeying this command, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers."** People need more than a church where they can worship. They need a Christian family where they are known and loved. They need to find us as long-lost relatives, as Christian cousins. And they can't do it without us!

Illus.: Several of you have met **Anna Billson**, who has come from Great Britain to study here. Till now, our token Brits were **Tom and Ruth McCartney**. Turns out they're related. Anna wrote, "*The relationship is very distant, so I'd not heard of the McCartneys until about a month before I arrived. My Mum was talking to Ruth's sister, Sadie (my great aunt by marriage), and mentioned that I was moving to Deerfield. Sadie recognised the name, as Ruth and Tom lived in Deerfield for many years. Emails were exchanged, and we were mutually excited to meet! I was amazed to find that, in this vast country, I had British family within 10 miles of me.*"

Ruth and Tom collected me from Trinity on my 5th day in America, and brought me to Village. I felt like a fish out of water in my new country, but the McCartneys welcomed me as family. They helped me adjust to American life, and provided for many of my needs. I spent Thanksgiving with them and their children and grandchildren. Their love and kindness to me has been an incredible blessing. God's provision for me through them has been evident, and I am grateful to find family even here, 3000 miles from home!"

That's what it is supposed to be like for *any* believer who comes into this fellowship. Every believer is family.

E. We have powerful motivations for showing hospitality.

One, as I've just said, is that we are kin. We're long-lost brothers and sisters. We have more in common than we realize because we have Christ.

Another reason is rooted deep in the Old Testament. **Deut 10:18-20** says, "*He [God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. Fear the Lord your God and serve him.*" We were never "foreigners in Egypt," but we are foreigners in this world. Peter calls us "foreigners and exiles." This world is not our home. So we welcome the Christian stranger into our spiritual family because where else will they feel at home? **That stranger is our kind of people.**

These verses also challenge us to love those who may not be Christians. It is a true Grace Gift! *Illus.:* We will never forget the two times we had Mohammed and his family over. I'd met him at the gas station where he worked. They, in turn, had us to their apartment. I only

knew Mohammed from stopping at the station each Sunday for a cup of coffee. One day, there was another customer in the store whom neither of us knew. But Mohammed raised his voice and pointed at me. He said to that shopper, *“This man, he is my very best friend.”* Mohammed died several years ago but recently his son confirmed that. **“You were his only American friend,” he said.**

Jesus brought this command to an even higher point. He told a parable about the King who gave different amounts of money to his three servants. Some invested it and received a return on the King’s money but one guy buried it in the ground. So **how do we invest the Lord’s resources?** The point comes a few verses later:

*“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, **I was a stranger and you invited me in,** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”* Mt 25:34-36

“I was a stranger and you invited me in.” That is how we invest the King’s resources.

When the church was established, hospitality became one of the cardinal virtues. Showing hospitality is on the lists of qualities required of elders. But it is extended to all believers. **Rom 12:13** says, *“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”* And **1 Pet. 4:9** says, *“Offer hospitality to one another **without grumbling.**”* Why do you suppose it says that? Because hospitality isn’t always easy. Someone might take advantage of you, or fail

to say thank you, or be needier than you bargained for. But instead of swearing off hospitality, don't grumble. This is what Christians do.

Illus.: A few years ago I read a book by **Mike McIntyre**, entitled, *The Kindness of Strangers: Penniless Across America*. This guy decided to hitchhike across the country with no money in his pockets. Among the many people he met were several Christians. He writes,

*Tim dropped out of high school to work in a Northern California lumber mill. When he got laid off, he moved his family to Lakeview. The closest job he could find was 150 miles south in the Nevada desert. He repaired mining equipment and slept in a tent, returning home once every ten days. He recently got hired at a Lakeview lumber mill, where he works six days a week, from four in the morning until eight at night. He and his family live around the corner from the church in a two-story duplex. They used to sublet one side, but had to evict the tenants because they trashed the place. Tim and his wife, Diane, don't plan to re-rent, though it's obvious they can use the money. **They want to keep the unit open for people who need emergency shelter. Tim calls it their ministry. "Just showing up at church on Sunday and putting a few shekels in the plate isn't enough," he says. "If you're gonna be a Christian, be a Christian."***

- F. Heb. 13:2 adds this tantalizing motivation, "*Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*" He is remembering the three visitors whom Abraham met and who promised the birth of Isaac. Two of them went on to meet Lot and rescued him and his family from Sodom

and Gomorrah. Abraham and Lot each showed hospitality to their disguised visitors and were blessed for it.

Angels are usually well-disguised. Their wings don't show. And they never just drop in without a reason. **Heb. 1:14** says they are "*all ministering spirits.*" In other words, they are always on a mission from God. **An open door to strangers is an open door to the Lord and his angels.** And whenever an angel shows up it is to bless those he visits as God's messenger. Almost anyone who has made a practice of hospitality to strangers would tell you, that whether or not an angel comes, they've been richly rewarded for their kindness.

Illus.: Kurt and Connie Krueger are friends of VCL who attend another church. Several years ago Connie got involved with helping refugees adjust to America. She loved it. Then along the way, she ran into an international student from Trinity. She learned that there were lots of international students, many who have never been in an American home. So, working with Trinity, she and Kurt started inviting students to their home every month, usually a different group of students each time. Some of our students here have been in their home. They've been at it for about five years now. I asked Kurt how many folks they figured they'd had in their home. He thought awhile and said, "*Maybe 250,*" he said, "*not counting children. Lots of children.*"

I asked Connie how she got into this? "*It was you!*" she said to my surprise. "*Me?*" "*Yes, you preached on Heb. 13:2 and I decided we needed to do something about it.*"

In a couple of weeks Connie is having a kitchen-full of wives over, many whose husbands are planning to be pastors. Many of these woman have had almost no

experience with hospitality, so Connie will show them how to prepare a simple meal like salad and muffins. She's like a hospitality evangelist.

Guess what verse Connie has in a little frame in her kitchen? *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”*