

The Rev. David R. Stock
Sermon 18 June 2018
Proper 6A

Texts: Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7; Matthew 9:35-10:8-23

Occasions commemorated: World Refugee Day/Rainbow Initiative/Juneteenth weekend

Emily and I were driving east on I-40, headed towards Oklahoma City, late on a summer afternoon. We were somewhere in New Mexico... clocking the miles... the barren yet beautiful landscape blurring by, to the left of us and to the right of us. We were heading home and trying to make some time, so I have to admit my foot was a bit heavy on the gas.

All of a sudden, we heard this loud bang! And then the sound of a helicopter landing on the car! ... which made it difficult to steer to say the least! It took me a second to realize that it was not a helicopter. We had a blow-out! And we had to limp our way to the side of the road. And then there was no sound except for the cars whizzing by.

For a few minutes I didn't know where we were or what we were going to do! And I began to wonder, "Why is it only times like this when one suddenly feels like one has to go to the bathroom?" You know...? Talk about total vulnerability! We were powerless, or so I thought. Who would want to stop and help? Would they want to take the risk, anyway? It could be dangerous! Lord knows, many times, I was that car driving by.

Well, we did have our AAA card, and, thankfully, we were only about 10 miles out from Albuquerque. So it wasn't that long before we were safe in a hotel room, with our car at a nearby shop, waiting for repairs. Even though we were not prepared to change a tire, we had resources...we had means. So, other than the AAA guy driving the truck, we did not have to take the risk and ask someone for help. We weren't that powerless! We could do something to help ourselves.

But there are many who do not have those privileges... that kind of backup. And it is hard to imagine the extremely vulnerable position of those who are immigrants, coming to this land in search of a new home, escaping persecution and oppression from their own countries. When they come here, they hope they will be greeted with hospitality, because they have to depend on it! Sadly, hospitality is not always offered, as we painfully know.

In our Gospel lesson from Matthew, when Jesus sends out his disciples to carry a message of love and of peace to strangers throughout the region, he told them not to go out carrying anything, no bag, sandals or extra clothes.... not even a cell phone! Instead, they were to depend totally on the hospitality of strangers. They were to be vulnerable immigrants, if you will, those without backup support or a place to lodge. The only catch was, those who helped them, or took them in to their own homes, would also have to take a risk.

Offering and accepting hospitality like that makes both parties vulnerable... It is be a “blind faith” covenant! Many are not willing to offer hospitality because we don’t put ourselves in that position.

And yet, Jesus told his disciples not to worry. If they were not shown hospitality, they were to “shake the dust off.” For the peace that they tried to share with others would return to them.

In other words, the disciples would receive peace themselves simply by making the choice to be vulnerable!

How vulnerable Abraham must have felt when he encountered three men coming close to his tent, travelers, perhaps...? And yet he goes overboard to show hospitality! Runs out to greet them. They don’t ask him for anything, or even say what they need. Yet Abraham assumes their need, and he practically begs them to take rest and refreshment. Of course, maybe he is bit too eager, since it’s Sarah who has to do all the work, after all!

But the amazing thing to me in this story is that it names the need that we all have to share hospitality. And we need to receive it as well. Being self-sufficient is bad for us!

We need to become vulnerable, as Abraham became, when he reached out to those mysterious travelers. And we need to be vulnerable like Sarah was when she received these visitors’ bold risk to reveal something personal that would change their lives (*that it was not too late to have posterity, even in old age.*) For it was in their desire and decision to welcome the stranger that they discovered that these three persons were at least heavenly visitors, if not God, in God’s very self!

And so it is with us. We have a desperate need to welcome one another, the “stranger, “the other,” the person who doesn’t look like us or speak the same language... or does not have the same privileges or the resources that we have...

and especially we need to welcome the immigrant, the one who is escaping oppression such as the one who’s sexual orientation or gender identity puts them in an increasing place of vulnerability...

We need to extend that hospitality even if, and especially if, it makes us uncomfortable. For we need to be in that space shared vulnerability, so that we may receive a tremendous gift that God offers each of us in that encounter... a gift of peace...

For that is how God reaches us, when we learn to not be so self-reliant, and ask for help and to offer hospitality to others. For when we offer ourselves in this way, we open ourselves to the presence of God, who reaches into the brokenness of our hearts and heals us, so that we can be instruments of healing amidst all the brokenness in our world...

Announcement: In commemoration World Refugee Day, we are highlighting Episcopal Migration Ministries, in particular, the “Rainbow Initiative,” which seeks to raise awareness and support of migrants who are seeking asylum because of persecution for their sexual orientation or gender identity in their own countries. To learn more about EMM and the Rainbow Initiative, join Fr. David in the living room area at 12:15 pm for a video discussion.

(Note: Due to Father’s Day celebrations, this event has been postponed to a more opportune time. The link to the video webinar was made available in the Newsletter.)