

## Hospitality

by Miriam Ryan

What comes to mind when you think about hospitality? Here in the South, we are known for it, we wave at people when they drive by whether we know them or not, we serve sweet tea with a smile, and when we go out for fast food people tell us it's "my pleasure" to serve you. Sometimes when we think of hospitality, we equate it with being nice and friendly to others. Or we might think that hospitality involves throwing Pinterest-inspired fancy parties and inviting friends into our homes. Some might view hospitality as a gift that some possess and others do not, which lets them off the hook. However, as we look at hospitality from a biblical perspective, we discover that hospitality is less about what you do and is more about a heart that is open to welcome others in Jesus' name and share what we have been given with others.

There is a beautiful story in scripture about hospitality that challenges a lot of our preconceived notions about what hospitality is supposed to look like. It involves a widow who fed a stranger amid her own poverty:

1 Kings 17:7-16

<sup>7</sup> Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup> "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." <sup>10</sup> So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

<sup>12</sup> "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.'"

<sup>15</sup> She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

The widow of Zarephath is in a desperate place. She has already survived the tragedy of losing her husband and now a famine has hit the land leaving her completely destitute. She has

enough flour and oil to bake one last meal for her and her son. And it is in this moment that she is asked to share the little she has with a stranger. Notice she doesn't argue with him or make excuses about why she is unable to extend hospitality; instead, she acts in faith and shares the little she has, trusting the stranger's word that God would continue to provide food for her and her son.

While most of us cannot imagine this sort of desperation, many of us can relate to the feeling that what we have is not enough to extend hospitality. What fears hold you back from inviting others in and extending hospitality? Where do you feel that what you have might not be enough? How might this woman's courage bolster your faith to step out and extend genuine hospitality to others?

#### Questions for Discussion

1. What stood out to you, encouraged you, or challenged you from past Sunday's sermon on hospitality?
2. When have you experienced or witnessed genuine hospitality? What struck you about the character and actions of the host?
3. What do you think it looks like practically speaking to extend hospitality to others in our day and time?
4. What holds you back from being more hospitable? What excuses do you make or what fears do you have?
5. Have you ever experienced or witnessed genuine hospitality from someone who gave like the woman of Zarephath, from a place of scarcity rather than abundance?
6. How might the example of this woman challenge you or reframe what hospitality looks like for you?
7. Do you think Kairos Church is known for a culture of hospitality? Why or why not? What do you think would happen if everyone in our church took risks to extend hospitality to others inside and outside of the church?
8. Who is someone that you would like to reach out to and be more hospitable toward?