

Introduction

2009 marks the 60th anniversary of The Good Samaritan Society. In 1949 Gottlieb Wedman, a farmer from Leduc, Alberta, discovered oil on his land and donated \$7,000 to be used for an “old folks’ home.” Members of Lutheran congregations united to build and operate Alberta’s first Auxiliary Hospital which opened in 1955. Since that time, The Good Samaritan Society has opened over 35 facilities and programs throughout Alberta and British Columbia.

One of the ways The Good Samaritan Society lives out its mission to extend Christian Hospitality is by providing pastoral care to those whom we serve. Chaplains are an integral part of how we provide for the spiritual needs of residents and clients, family members, staff and volunteers. They do this by offering Christian hospitality: being present, listening, celebrating, caring, and supporting.

The devotions in *With Open Arms: Reflections on Christian Hospitality* are written by Good Samaritan Society chaplains as well as two clergy members of The Good Samaritan Society Board of Directors. *With Open Arms* is our gift to you. If you wish to make a donation to the Pastoral Care Endowment Fund in support of our chaplains, please fill out the donation envelope in this booklet and return it to us in the mail. *Thank you in advance for your support!*

Rev. Renita Falkenstern, Editor (rfalkenstern@gss.org)

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Read Isaiah 55:1-7

Yahweh's Invitation

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (v. 1)

One Sunday morning, Karl invited several of us from church to come and visit him at work the next day. Karl has several developmental disabilities, and for the first time in his life he had a real job. The next day I went to the McDonald's to see Karl at work. His job was to clean the floors and tables and to stock condiments and napkins. He sang to himself as he worked and it was obvious he loved his job. When Karl spotted me he ushered me to a table and told me to wait for him. A moment later, Karl reappeared carrying a tray of food. He grinned and said, "This is the best part: the food is *free!*"

A simple, free meal was enough to fill Karl with joy. His joy increased when he was given the chance to extend hospitality to another person and to invite me to share in the meal with him. This passage in Isaiah is God's invitation to have a free meal. God wants to share joy and love with us. God invites us to sit at his table and to eat and drink at no cost. God's gift of grace is free.

The following Sunday as I accompanied Karl to the Communion table I remembered his big smile and his words, "This is the best part: the food is *free!*"

Dear God, thank you for your invitation to eat and drink freely at your table. Amen.

Virginia Burke is training to be a deaconess and serves as Chaplain at Royal Oak Manor in Lacombe, Alberta and with Programs for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PPDD) in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read Genesis 18:1-8

Joy Springs Out of Serving

“Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.” (v. 8)

Abraham ran to meet his guests, called for a specially prepared meal, and then stood at their service during the meal. There was a sense of joy and delight in the way Abraham served his guests. I envision Abraham standing like a willing waiter at the table. In our cynicism we may think, “Abraham isn’t honouring the strangers. He is attentive because he knows THE LORD is there!”

The deeper truth is that the Lord *is* actually present in such loving acts of service. Through our serving, God brings great joy. I experience this in my own life as Chaplain and see it often in the relationships of staff, residents, families and volunteers at Southgate Care Centre. The Lord accompanies me all day long and joy springs out of serving. For some reason God has gifted me with the ability to remember names. It brings incredible joy to see the light that comes from people who are greeted with their own name.

This morning I stopped by one of the first floor dining tables and greeted each resident by name. It was Bill’s turn and I asked, “Bill, how are you today?” He replied with a smile, “Grumpy!” He kept grinning. I smiled too, knowing that “grumpy” was on hold for a moment. God brought joy to both of us.

God of joy, you supply us with a wide range of abilities and resources. Help us, your servants, to see opportunities to serve you in the people we meet today. Amen.

Rev. Ed Chell serves as Chaplain at Southgate Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Caught by Surprise

"[He] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (vv. 18-19)

It happened to us on a Sunday morning. We were on our way to church in a little town where I was serving as pastor early in my ministry. I had forgotten to check my gas gauge the night before, and suddenly our car stopped. I had to be at the church in 30 minutes. I was worried.

Within a minute a car pulled up and out jumped a young man with a beard, long hair, torn jeans, and dirty shirt. He had noticed me standing at the edge of the road and said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yes, if you could. I've run out of gas, and I have some at my house a mile back up the road. Could you take me there?" "Sure," he said.

After we returned, I reached in my pocket for my wallet, and said, "Can I give you something for your trouble?" He had noticed my clerical collar and just smiled, saying, "No, it was no trouble at all. I work for the Carpenter, too."

And suddenly I realized that I had been on the receiving end of Christian hospitality. And I never forgot that young man. Whenever I have an opportunity to help a stranger, I think of him, knowing that it gives me a chance to work for the Carpenter, too. "You shall also love the stranger," it says in Deuteronomy.

Lord Jesus, help us to love others, as you have loved us. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Richard Kraemer is the former President of Concordia University College and a member of The Good Samaritan Society Board of Directors.

Read Mark 14:1-9

Caring for the Dying

"[Jesus] said... 'She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.' " (v. 8)

Many people enter helping professions because they want to heal people, to make them well again. This is a noble desire. However, there are times in life when being made well again is not possible. There are times when death is inevitable.

This passage from Mark is such an occasion. Jesus knew his time to die was drawing near. There was no preventing it. Jesus described those who refused to accept this as a hindrance to him. There are times in our professional and personal lives when offering Christian hospitality means helping people prepare to die.

Many people for whom we care in Good Samaritan Society facilities are nearing the close of their earthly journeys, as was Jesus when he encountered this unnamed woman in Bethany who anointed him. She could not extend his life, but she did what she could: anoint his body and bless his soul.

We cannot extend the lives of some of the people for whom we provide care. However, like this unnamed woman who did what she could, we can anoint their bodies with our hands and bless their spirits with our compassion.

Gracious God, help us deal with our discomfort with and denial of death, that we may extend Christian hospitality to those whose earthly pilgrimage draws to a close. Bless our hands to anoint the dying with the same kindness that the anonymous woman in Bethany gave to your Son long ago. Amen.

Rev. Brian Amison is Chaplain at Garden Vista in Magrath, Alberta.

Read 1 John 4:7-21

God's Hospitality and Ours

"We love because he first loved us." (v. 19)

Recently, while I was conducting worship in one of our dementia and Alzheimer's cottages, we had a restless resident constantly coming in and then leaving the room. Another resident seemed to be very distracted by this. Finally she said in a rather irritable tone of voice: "Will you please sit down?" The restless resident ignored the other one, and I could see that the latter was rather distraught, so I replied: "Please leave her be. She cannot help it. God loves her too."

Upon hearing my words, the frustrated resident's facial expression was quite demonstrative, as if a light bulb had come on, and she said: "I hadn't thought of it that way before. You are right." The remainder of our worship time continued peacefully, without any disturbances, because we shared in God's hospitality towards us and our hospitality towards each other.

There are times, circumstances and people that challenge us to respond in love and hospitality, rather than judgement and hostility. John's vision of God's saving love through Jesus invites us to remember that we, too, as people of God, created in God's image, are called to live out God's gift of love each day. For in this love we discover the deepest, lasting meaning and purpose of our lives.

How rich and vast is your love for us, O God! We praise and thank you, Jesus, for your unconditional, unlimited, saving love for each one of us and the whole world. Help us to share your love with all of your sinner-saints. Amen.

Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson serves as Chaplain at South Ridge Village in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Read Revelation 21:1-6

The Home of God

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God...he will wipe every tear from their eyes." (vv. 3b-4a)

We are magnetically drawn into the hopeful imagery of this passage. As God's people, we wish earthly time would pass quickly so that we could "cut to the chase" and move into the time of the kingdom of God. Yet, the kingdom of God is close at hand. Whenever the presence and the love of Christ are proclaimed, we catch a glimpse of the kingdom here on earth.

At the Mill Woods Centre, a group of residents have made the commitment to gently and effectively proclaim to staff, residents and visitors that God is at home there. Several times a week, a team of residents walks the hallways ringing hand chimes in a melody that proclaims: "God is Present in This Place." We know God is actively present, wiping tears, receiving pain, and satisfying thirst with water from the spring of life.

The ringers themselves reflect the truth of their message. In fact, God *is* the true host of this home. As we sharpen our awareness of God's presence, we experience the open arms of God welcoming each of us as his children. We are God's people, already living in the reign of God as it is proclaimed in our midst.

Are you aware of God dwelling in your home? Do you know God as a guest, or is God the host?

God of our homes, we ask for continual awareness of your presence and encouragement and unconditional love. Let us proclaim in word and deed your presence dwelling among us. Amen.

Julie Hink is a deaconess and Chaplain of Mill Woods Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read Exodus 16:13-32

God Provides

"...those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed." (v. 18)

God's provision for his people became very real as they were forced to depend on God to provide their daily bread (or manna) in the wilderness. This same provision exists today. God is present among the people affected by local and global disasters like famine in Africa, earthquakes in Central America, floods in Louisiana and tidal waves in Thailand. When we hear of these disasters, our hearts are moved to prayer, our gifts are given to the local food bank or to those international agencies we favour. We also look for signs that God has once again accompanied and empowered those whose lives have been so drastically altered.

Christian hospitality starts with faith in God to provide for creation, and then moves us to compassion and caring for those outside of our small circle. The story of the manna reminds us that God loves us and provides for our daily needs. All that we have is a gift. In response we are called to thank God daily. As God's people we are also invited to participate in the work of caring for the hungry and to look into our own larders and share from the plenty that is there.

Trusting in God to care for us, we need not take too much manna for ourselves, and having much provides a wonderful opportunity for us to share.

Thank you God for your provision of love and daily bread to share with the hungry. Amen.

Rev. Orlow Lund is the Chaplain at Dr. Gerald Zetter Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read John 13:1-15

Hospitality & Servanthood

"...I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (v. 15)

For some years in the parish I included foot-washing as a part of Maundy Thursday worship, along with the Lord's Supper. Most people were very hesitant to participate in foot-washing. "I shower every day so I don't need my feet washed at worship," said many.

In Jesus' day it was very different — foot-washing was necessary to freshen up before a meal or when one arrived for a visit. Walking any distance on the hot and dusty roads certainly resulted in dirty and sweaty feet. So a nice cool basin of water to wash the dust from one's feet was certainly welcomed and expected as an act of hospitality. If there were servants in the household this was one of their responsibilities so that guests could relax while their feet were soothingly cleaned and refreshed from the tiring walk of the day.

At Wexford Creek we are involved in such servanthood every day by simply caring for our residents' basic needs. Our staff help residents get out of bed and get dressed in the morning; assist them with their toilet and taking a bath; help them with their daily meals; take them for walks or push their wheelchairs when they get tired; and take care of their medications.

We simply need to look around in our world to discern the various opportunities to be hospitable in the simplest of ways as we serve one another in the name of Jesus.

Show us the ways, Lord, that we can be welcoming and caring toward one another. Amen.

Rev. Gary Schenk is Chaplain at Wexford Creek in Nanaimo, B.C.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

A Grace-filled Welcome

"[Love] is not irritable or resentful....It bears all things." (vv. 5, 7)

Love is at the root of Christian hospitality, but we all have days when we are more inclined to offer a cold shoulder of rejection than a warm heart of welcome – at least I do.

Jesus doesn't encourage us to share our lives only with the people with whom we feel comfortable, or like, or know will respond to our gift of hospitality with gratitude. He made space in his life for the lost, the least and the losers. From the cross he opened his arms and his heart to even the arrogant and the hard-hearted, praying: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

When we meet nice people who make us feel warm and fuzzy inside, it's easy to open our arms in welcome. But with people who irritate us with their look, their attitude or their behaviour – that's another story. We would rather push them out of our lives and barricade the door with resentment, judgment and unforgiveness. Who needs that kind of aggravation? But if love "bears all things" then what?

To let these people in takes an act of grace. It's not going to happen just because we know it's the Christian thing to do. On those days we need to let a little of God's love sweep the cobwebs of resentment out of our hearts. And only when we have allowed ourselves to feel the generous, grace-filled hospitality of God are we ready to turn with a smile and say: "Welcome."

Lord, warm our hearts with your love, that our hearts may be warm towards others. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Chris Nojonen is Chaplain at Clearwater Centre in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Read Luke 15:11-32

The Waiting Father

"...this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." (v. 32b)

Welcome home! The excitement and activity makes it look like a hero's return. But this was the returning prodigal who had left on such bad terms he could no longer call this his home. He assumed his father had disowned him. However, even though the heartbroken father had said, "This son of mine was dead," he yearned for his son's return. At last that day comes! He is so overjoyed that he throws dignity to the wind and runs to meet his son, hugs and kisses him, ignoring his confession. With a grand celebration, he honours him as his true son and honoured guest. The father explains his festive mood, "My son is alive again."

This grand act of hospitality is a sign of something deeper: reconciliation and forgiveness. Have you ever thought it easy for God to forgive? Then think about the waiting father agonizing over his lost son. Love made him vulnerable to that pain. It also gave him the burning desire to do what others would not: forgive.

The son did not expect this. His highest hope was to become a household servant. He could not forgive himself, at least not yet. That's not surprising. The hardest person to forgive is yourself. But God, even though aware of your sins, refuses to let them stand in the way. So if God forgives you, how can you disagree? God welcomes you as a member of the family. Welcome home!

Our Father, show us how to forgive ourselves, just as you forgive our sins. Count us among the members of your family. Amen.

Rev. Cliff Guebert is a member of the Board of Directors for The Good Samaritan Society.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

We Need Each Other

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable..." (vv. 21-22)

I grew up on a farm and have enjoyed doing a lot of gardening as well. I know the importance of machinery like tractors, balers and combines, and gardening tools like rototillers, hoes and shovels. These machines and tools are definitely seen as necessary. Less noticeable is the seed that is put in the ground, but what would there be to farm or garden without those little seeds? The farm and garden, human growth and health depend on those seeds and what they produce when they are well cared for.

In this passage the weaker, seemingly inferior people of God's family are indispensable, and the more noticeable, stronger, seemingly superior people "need" these weaker people. Just as it may not be obvious how dependent we all are on little seeds, it may not be so obvious how we "need" the seemingly weaker people in our society like the elderly and ill. Nonetheless, our spiritual health only thrives when we make use of our gifts and abilities (our tools) to care for those who need help and care, and those who are weaker have so much to share and contribute. We really do "need" each other.

Loving and gracious God, you love us all equally and see us all as important. Help us to see the value in each other as you do. Amen.

Dallas Hjorth serves as Chaplain at Stony Plain Care Centre and New Cottages, George Hennig Place (Stony Plain), Spruce Grove Centre, and Pembina Village (Evansburg) in Alberta.

Read James 5:13-16

Healing Hospitality

"Are any among you suffering? They should pray...Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed." (vv. 13a, 16)

"I'll pray for you," responded the care aid, as she and a new resident came off the elevator together. It came so naturally and genuinely. The resident was sharing the pain and anxiety of moving away from his spouse who remained in another care facility across town. This was a resident who had been particularly difficult and challenging since his arrival. Yet the care aid patiently, literally slowed down, walked alongside him and extended genuine care.

This happened just down the hall from the Chaplain's office, and was such an expression of pastoral care, that I had to investigate. The young care aid subsequently told me she prays both for and with those who want it! What an expression of "Christian Hospitality"! The mission of The Good Samaritan Society is to extend Christian Hospitality, but this young care aid really understood what it meant to "be the mission."

The purpose of prayer is "so that you may be healed," says James. There are various kinds of healing. It seemed to me on that auspicious day, that the pain of grief and loneliness, of estrangement and longing was banished, at least for a moment, through the balm of healing hospitality and community.

Bless us today, Lord, and make us your blessing to others. Amen.

Rev. Terje Ness is the Chaplain at Mountainview Village in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Read Matthew 7:7-12

The Call Button

“ ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.’ ” (v. 7)

You have fallen. You don't know why or how. You're bewildered and it's hard to move around. Nothing seems broken, but you just can't get up on your own. The door is shut, so no one will notice what has happened.

– A room, when you're by yourself, can be a lonely place, especially if you need help.

On your wrist is a bracelet with a big red button. You press it. Soon a voice comes over the phone intercom. Then familiar faces surround you, checking for injuries and any other problems. This is more than a dry, clinical assessment. From their kindness, you know that you are safe, that you will be taken care of, that you can relax. You are cared *about*, not just cared *for*.

On any given day, we can sometimes find ourselves in a lonely place. There is no big red button for loneliness or sadness. Still, a conversation with someone can reawaken our interest and compassion, and a gentle touch from another person can remind us that we are cared *about*. At times, spiritually, we can also be in a lonely place. In prayer we call out to God and someone enters our lives with a word of forgiveness, hope, or joy. And we realize again that someone cares *about* us. We are safe. We can relax.

Thank you, Lord. We see that you care because of the people who surround us. Their forgiveness, hope and joy let us know your heart. We are secure and can rest easy in your hands. Amen.

Rev. James Lindemann is Chaplain at West Highlands Centre and Park Meadows Village in Lethbridge, Alberta.



Chaplain Julie Hink and Volunteer Donna Duggan at the Mill Woods Centre Christmas party in Edmonton, Alberta.



A sketch of the stained glass window of the Good Samaritan located at Victoria Heights in New Westminster, B.C. The side panels feature familiar images of New Westminster.



Staff receive the Blessing of Hands during a Founder's Day service at the Corporate Office in Edmonton, Alberta.



Resident Doreen Miller and Chaplain Terje Ness at Mountainview Village in Kelowna, B.C.

Read Luke 5:17-26

Determination

"...but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus." (v. 19)

"If there's a will there's a way." This saying certainly applies to the events in our scripture passage. You can almost hear them shouting: "We can't get in the door? No problem! We'll cut a hole in the roof and lower him to the feet of Jesus!" What a demonstration of will and determination! What a display of working around a problem and exploring alternatives in a situation that seemed hopeless.

Each day I see numerous incidents of such will and determination among the residents, families, staff, and volunteers at Hillside Village and Pioneer Lodge: the lady moving herself inch by inch down the hallway in her wheel chair. The family member visiting their loved one day after day in the midst of their own health concerns. The staff member finding a creative way of doing some task that initially seemed impossible. The list could go on.

The question for us is: can we look to find alternatives and the available resources in order to bring help and life to others? When we recognize and encourage self-determination in others, we promote true Christian hospitality, especially for those who feel really helpless. Without determination it is difficult to show true hospitality.

Dear God, help us to see the need in the lives of others. Then give us the will and the determination to explore all of the possibilities and to respond to that need. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. William Kiesman serves as Chaplain at Hillside Village and Pioneer Lodge in Salmon Arm, British Columbia.

Read Luke 19:1-10

Size Doesn't Matter

"He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature." (v. 3)

Physically, Zacchaeus was a small man, so people paid him little attention. Others said he was not acceptable, but Jesus made him a giant in faith.

I am big (6'2" and 245 pounds) and people comment on my size all the time. I am aware that my size can be intimidating. But when people get to know me they see I am really a huggable teddy bear. When entering a resident's room, if they are laying on their bed, or sitting in a chair, I sit down so that we are on the same plane. I no longer tower over them and we become equals in size. We are then able to talk freely without my size being a barrier to conversation.

Jesus didn't judge Zacchaeus by his size. He accepted him for who he was, a child of Abraham. Jesus doesn't judge us by our stature either. Just as Zacchaeus was changed by his personal encounter with Jesus, we too are transformed by Jesus to see others differently. When we get to know people, we can stop judging them by our preconceived notions and try to see them as Christ saw Zacchaeus, as someone he wanted to spend time with.

True Christian hospitality does not depend on a person's status or stature. Christian hospitality involves sharing the Gospel with everyone. As with Zacchaeus, physical size doesn't matter. What matters is a receptive and open heart.

Lord, you see our hearts. Help us to see ourselves and others as you do, as people for whom you were willing to die. Amen.

Rev. Laird Borst is the Chaplain at Good Shepherd Lutheran Home in Wetaskiwin, Alberta.

Read Mark 9:33-37

Welcoming

"Whoever welcomes one such child...welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (v. 37)

Spend time in a nursery and you learn lots about generous compassion as you comfort crying infants, assure anxious parents and change dirty diapers. It seems to me a nursery teaches much about the nature of welcome. Jesus enacted a parable by placing a child before his disciples, then took the child into his arms and said, "Whoever welcomes one such child...welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

There is an apparent inclination in many organizations and faith communities to act as gate keepers, making certain that those who are seen as unworthy are not brought in. The emphasis on competition and winning do not square with the spirit of hospitality in Jesus who encourages us to welcome those who are left out or left behind.

When Jesus makes an example of this child, he is saying whoever wants to be in charge must be last and slave of all. This is a radical overturning of the usual social order, setting a pattern for his followers. Those who take Jesus' teaching on this point to heart and live it out consistently in the world may find it costly in worldly terms. Yet it is a way that each of us may find to be a path which leads to lasting peace.

What would our lives look like if we responded to this action of Jesus who put a child in the midst of their debate over "who is the greatest"?

O God, we pray that as we welcome one another, we will come to understand the nature of compassion. Amen.

Rev. Ray Niebergall serves as Chaplain at Christenson Village, Gibsons, B.C, and at Victoria Heights, New Westminster, B.C.

Read Luke 14:1, 7-14

Humility and Hospitality

"When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable." (v. 7)

This teaching of Jesus is a puzzle. Taken literally, it has the sense of saying, "Be humble and show hospitality for a short period of time as a way of getting ahead." Pretending to be humble is not being humble. Christian humility and hospitality on the other hand are beautiful gifts that God grants us when we let love for one another take the lead. Both entail the wondrous ability to get outside of ourselves and to see ourselves in right relation with God and to others with whom we share a common humanity.

To the guests gathered on that day perhaps what Jesus was trying to say was that humility and hospitality are things that are given to us by God. This is a parable about how to make room to receive these gifts. These gifts are different for every individual who has received them. I do know this: in the shared living space that residents, staff and volunteers experience here at Village by the Station in Penticton, those who have the gifts of humility and hospitality are a treasure to the entire community. My observation is that such folk are the ones that the entire community truly holds in high esteem and honours.

O God, we give you thanks on this day for those you have sent our way who have been given the gift of true humility. They are treasured gifts and teachers of your grace. May they inspire us to make room to receive that gift for the sake of others. Amen.

Rev. Ron Bjorgan serves as Chaplain at Village by the Station in Penticton, British Columbia.

Read Matthew 14:13-21

Moved by Compassion

"[Jesus] saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them." (v. 14)

Miracle stories are hard for me to get my head around. Five thousand men – plus women and children. In those days families tended to be larger than they are today, so when we do the math we can figure that somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand individuals may have shared this meal that started out with five loaves and two fish and ended up with twelve baskets of leftovers! It boggles the mind.

When I think of hospitality, it's easy for me to think of the big Christmas dinners my mother used to cook – sometimes feeding up to twenty-four people. (Okay, not thousands, but we had a full house filled with enticing aromas, scrumptious food and lively fellowship.) Perhaps you have such memories as well. Hospitality begins with openness and continues in service. We open our homes and hearts to others and use our resources to address their needs. Christian hospitality adds the awareness that we are following a model of welcome and giving that we see in Jesus.

Jesus always wants to stretch us beyond the comfortable. The hospitality Jesus offered in this gospel story happens precisely at a time when he was seeking his own "down time." Perhaps this is a true mark of hospitality, when it happens out of compassion, despite our fatigue or busyness or disinterest. We may not feel in the least bit equipped but out of our meager offering Jesus creates a miracle of warmth and welcome, a feast of Christian hospitality.

Lord Jesus, give us today a heart willing to reach out in compassion, and to offer even small tokens of love in your name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Chris Nojonen is Chaplain at Clearwater Centre in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Read Isaiah 58:6-9

From the Heart

"Is not this the fast that I choose:...to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them..." (v. 7)

In our culture, especially during the present economic downturn, it is easy for all of us to primarily look out for number one, ourselves. Whether we are driving, walking, visiting, or whatever, we default to self-preservation mode. Even when we are trying to help someone out, it is difficult (if not impossible) to put our egos aside. We focus on what others think of us when it comes to being hospitable. Don't we like it when people notice what we do and compliment us on it? Don't we like it when we get the recognition we may or may not deserve? "Look at me. Aren't I a wonderful person?"

That was the problem with the people Isaiah was talking to in the reading. God was rejecting their attempts at being religious. God never looks exclusively at the actions of the individual, but also at the motivation behind the actions. Actions that are pleasing to God reflect God's sense of compassion, putting the self aside and seeing to the needs of the other. True hospitality, according to Isaiah, comes from the heart, sees a lonely or hungry or homeless person and attends to their needs.

Christian hospitality also points to Jesus and his love for us as our motivation. Such hospitality reflects the love of God within us and enables us to give of ourselves without looking for recognition because we are already recognized by God.

Gracious God, you share with us freely. Through your Spirit help us to freely share with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Doug Heine is Chaplain at Mountain View Centre in Hinton, Alberta.

Read Matthew 25:31-40

The Visit

"...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (v. 40)

I remember different times in my life when I have moved and became a stranger in a new place. At these times, when I felt alone, I experienced both the coldness of not being welcomed by people, and the warmth and grace of God in people who did welcome, visit and befriend me. Whether a person is loved or not loved can influence how they feel about themselves, about life, about God.

So much can happen in a visit. A person can be appreciated, cared for, listened to, read to, and prayed with. In the simple act of visiting, a person can experience God's love and grace instead of loneliness and despair. A staff person recently told me about how she spent a few moments with a resident – just talking – before she portered her to an activity. As they were leaving her room the resident said, "It sure feels good to be loved by you." This staff person was crying as she told me this and how that comment touched her deeply.

Jesus reminds us of the importance of the act of visiting – the value of the visit for the one who is visited *as well as* for the visitor.

Lord Jesus, you truly loved people. Be present when we visit the members of your large family and help us to show, and to receive, your love and grace. Amen.

Dallas Hjorth serves as Chaplain at Stony Plain Care Centre and New Cottages, George Hennig Place (Stony Plain), Spruce Grove Centre, and Pembina Village (Evansburg) in Alberta.

Read Matthew 22:34-45

To Love God & Neighbour

[[Jesus] said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' " (vv. 37-39)

Ever since Jesus told his parable of the great Judgement (Matthew 25:31-46), Christians have realised that God, in the person of Jesus, is as close as one's neighbour. In offering hospitality through giving food and drink to the hungry and thirsty; welcoming the stranger; clothing the naked; taking care of the sick; and visiting the prisoner, it is as if we do these things to Jesus himself. All of these acts of Christian hospitality are concrete examples of what it means to love God and love our neighbour.

As a Good Samaritan Society chaplain I am privileged and blessed daily to both give and receive Christian hospitality. I have seen Christ in the smiles and joyous laughter of staff, residents, family members and volunteers. I have heard words of kindness spoken, inviting a new resident to make themselves at home and participate in facility programs. When emotions of sorrow and grief come flooding out, I have witnessed the afflicted being comforted with a hug or a gentle touch. I have smelled and tasted nutritious meals prepared with care and served by our friendly dietary staff. I have offered to read scripture, share a reflection, and pray with many residents. Such small instances of hospitality, in Christ's eyes, do make a difference and are blessed whenever they fulfill the commandment to love God and neighbour.

Thank you for being present, Jesus, to bless the smallest acts of hospitality. Amen.

Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson is Chaplain at South Ridge Village in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Read Romans 8:31-39

Blessed Assurance

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(vv. 38a-39)*

New people arriving in long term care naturally have lots of anxieties and insecurities. To help them come to terms with their new life, all of the team members meet with them in order to get to know their history, personality, preferences, abilities and challenges. We get to know them and how we can best help them. Relationships are built. We invite their family to become a part of their care, enhancing their life in ways only family can.

But even with all of these activities, spiritual anxieties usually remain, either due to the nature of their illness or the reality of the end of life in the not so distant future. Thank God for such powerful and inclusive passages of scripture like Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul assures his hearers that nothing in all creation can separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

I remember seeing the light bulb go on in a woman's eyes when she finally heard this passage addressed to her and all of her fears, anxieties, and insecurities. She had assumed that God did not love her anymore. Her degenerative illness seemed to signal a dislike from God for "something" she had done in her life. Yet she yearned for God's love to blanket, warm and assure her.

Thank you, God, for loving us so much and granting us the blessed assurance of your love for us in all circumstances. Amen.

Rev. Orlow Lund is Chaplain at the Dr. Gerald Zetter Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read John 15:12-17

Friends of Jesus

"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." (v. 15)

Jesus wants a relationship with us. That is what Christianity is all about. Do you know Jesus, deeply, intimately, as a close friend or is he just an acquaintance? He wants us to know his heart, his words and his promises. He wants to be our close friend.

If you think about your most trusted friend, perhaps you can appreciate what kind of a relationship Jesus desires to have with us. With your closest friend you can be totally yourself, transparent and real. You can speak what is on your mind. You can share with them the deepest fears, needs and joys of your life. Most importantly, that friend accepts and loves you completely. Even when you are having a bad day or when you really mess things up, that friend understands, supports and forgives you. If this is the kind of unconditional acceptance we can receive from a human being who cares for us, how much more will Jesus love us? Jesus is infinitely patient, kind and loving. If others forsake or disappoint us, Jesus remains faithful. He is present with us in every time of need. What a blessing it is to have Jesus as our closest friend and saviour.

Dear Jesus, we give you thanks for your friendship and faithfulness in the midst of our joys and sorrows. Help us to be open and honest with you about our deepest thoughts and needs so that we might also praise you for your goodness and faithfulness. Amen.

Rev. Bill Pantzer serves as Chaplain at Heron Grove in Vernon, British Columbia.

Read Psalm 100

Cause for Celebration

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” (v. 4a)

Each of the programs and facilities I work at is like family, with its own personalities and dynamics. In each place, we come together as a team to discover what the different needs, characteristics, and interests of the clients and residents are. We then try to help them reach their greatest potential through the love and nurturing we give them. This is not an easy task as many of the clients and residents have frail bodies and minds affected by various kinds of dementia.

Providing pastoral care to residents and clients with dementia can present its challenges but can also be a source of awe and wonder. It is amazing to watch how reading a familiar Bible verse or singing a well-loved hymn can bring joy and delight to people’s eyes. It’s as if they have awakened from a long winter’s nap.

The joy and delight that light up their face is infectious and spreads to everyone in their presence. I am humbled to share in this soul-awakening work. But spiritual care is not something only chaplains can offer. I see it given by managers, doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, recreation workers, home support workers and many other staff members and volunteers who recognize that the holistic health and wellness of our clients and residents depends on our ability to care for the whole person, including their spiritual needs.

Thank you, God, for the opportunity to journey with people as they face some of their greatest challenges and to celebrate with them some of their most profound successes. Amen.

Rev. Robert Marshall is Chaplain at CHOICE – The Place and CHOICE at Dr. Gerald Zetter Care Centre, Wedman House and Wedman Village in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read Romans 12:13-14

Bless the Stranger

"Bless those who persecute you..." (v. 14a)

One of the jobs of a camp counsellor is to guide a small group of strangers into becoming a cabin of friends. During my first summer at Mulhurst Lutheran Camp, I discovered that this task can be very difficult. The eight strangers in my cabin had decided by the first night that they would be enemies for life. In an effort to bring peace to the feuding cabin, I brought the girls together for prayer. One little girl prayed, "God bless Susie even though I hate her. But I suppose you don't. So maybe help me see her the way you do."

The Apostle Paul would have enjoyed this little girl's prayer. In his letter to the Romans, Paul urges that love "be genuine." This little girl was being genuine. She did not try to hide the fact that she considered Susie to be her enemy. She asked for God to help her see Susie the way God sees her, as a beloved child of God.

We can try to remember this little girl's prayer in our own struggles to accept people whom we find difficult to stomach. When God opens our hearts and our minds to see strangers or enemies the way that God sees them, it becomes genuinely possible to regard them with compassion and to bless them.

By the end of the week at Mulhurst, the girls who began the week as enemies finished as best friends.

Lord, help us see those strangers around us as you see them, as beloved children of God. Amen.

Virginia Burke serves as Chaplain at Royal Oak Manor in Lacombe, Alberta and with Programs for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PPDD) in Edmonton, Alberta.

Read Galatians 5:16-26

Fruit Pie

"... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (vv. 22-23a)

Concerning fractions, a teacher asked: "Suppose your mother baked an apple pie, and there were seven of you — your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?"

"A sixth, ma'am," a boy answered.

"But there are seven of you. Don't you know anything about fractions?"

"I know all about fractions. But I also know my mother. She would say she didn't want any pie."

Mom made a pie that she wouldn't enjoy. Did she forgo her piece in order to "watch her figure" or was it rather that, like many parents, the pleasure was not in the pie itself, but in watching those she cared for enjoy her gift. After all, it was a gift! It was something additional (sadly, desserts are never a necessity) that came from her heart, her love.

Out of God's heart comes love, not just to us but also *through* us. That is why "love, joy, peace" and the other qualities mentioned in this scripture passage are called *fruit* of the Spirit, because they are the *result* of God's loving presence in our lives. Such love is what frees us to share our best selves with others. Trusting in God's unconditional love for us, we are free from the need to be fearful about ourselves, and free to be patient, kind, generous, faithful and gentle toward those whom God has given us to love.

Lord, it truly is the sweetest dessert when your love is mixed with the "fruit of the Spirit" and lived out in each act of generosity. Amen.

Rev. James Lindemann is Chaplain at West Highlands Centre and Park Meadows Village in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Your gift to Pastoral Care...

Since opening the doors of The Good Samaritan Society, we have been bringing the love of Jesus to those who are hurting or in need of a word of encouragement. Starting with one full-time chaplain in 1966, Pastoral Care Services has grown to include 19 pastors serving over 6,400 residents and clients.

Every gift to our Pastoral Care Endowment Fund through the form of a chapel offering, lifetime membership, spring appeal donation, or free will offering adds to our mission "... to extend Christian Hospitality through a continuum of care to those in need or at risk..." strengthening the spiritual aspect of our holistic care. The interest earned from the Endowment Fund is **used to provide pastoral care** because we believe the spiritual component is vital to the well-being of those we serve. The generosity of our donors to the Endowment enables this valued service to exist within the programs of The Good Samaritan Society and ensures that we can continue to provide the spiritual nourishment that our residents and clients need to give further meaning to their lives.

If you wish to make a donation to the Pastoral Care Endowment Fund in support of our chaplains, please fill out the donation envelope in this booklet and return it to us in the mail.

Thank you for your support!