

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/19/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I said previously, hospitality is one of the highest values in the Bible. One of the best stories to illustrate this comes from Genesis. It is presented to two parts that show the contrast between being hospitable and inhospitable. Unfortunately, the second part has too often been presented incorrectly and used to falsely condemn people today.

The first part appears in Genesis 18:1-8. Three strangers appear near the camp of Abraham and Sarah. We later come to know these three as God and two angels (some have suggested that the two angels are actually Jesus and the Holy Spirit). Initially, Abraham does not know who they are but immediately invites them to come and rest. He brings them water to drink and to wash their feet. He has Sarah make some bread for them and he gets a choice calf and prepares it for them. (It is on the basis of this passage that Hebrews 13:2 says, *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”*) After this welcome and time of respite, the two angels go on, but God stays behind to talk with Abraham about several important issues.

The second part of the two-part story follows very closely to the first and is recorded in Genesis 19:1-26. Now the two angels arrive in the great city of Sodom. It is evening, so they prepare to sleep in the town square. Lot, who happens to be Abraham’s nephew, insists that they come and stay with him. This was a common expectation and practice in Biblical times, to take strangers into one’s home for the night. But the men of Sodom don’t like these strangers being there and all of them come to Lot’s home and demand that the visitors be given to them “so that we can have sex with them.” Lot refuses and tries to get the townsmen to go away. He even offers his daughters to the men instead of the strangers. When the men try to force their way into Lot’s home, the angels pull Lot inside and strike the townsmen blind. The next day, Lot, his wife, and his daughters flee the city, and Sodom and all its inhabitants are destroyed.

As I said, this second story is often misrepresented and used to judge people today. But there are some important details that show how this interpretation is incorrect and what the story really means. The false understanding of the story is that the men—in fact, all the men of Sodom—are homosexuals because they want to have sex with the two strangers. First of all, if they were all homosexual, this wouldn’t be much of a city. Yet Sodom was one of the largest and most thriving cities of that time with many husbands, wives, and families. Second, there was a practice that when an enemy was defeated, the victorious army would “sodomize” (the term that developed because of this story) the defeated army, humiliating them to the point where they would never again try to fight the victors. The men of Sodom don’t want aliens in their town and sodomizing them will guarantee that they will never come back. Third, the fact that Lot offers his daughters to them suggests again that they are not homosexual or this would have been an empty offer by Lot. (And while we have issues with Lot’s offer, remember that in

this time period children and women were seen as property for the owner to with as he pleased. This doesn't justify what Lot did, but it helps to explain it.) Hospitality, though, was so important that Lot would "sacrifice" his daughters in order to protect his guests.

Sodom was not destroyed for homosexuality or immorality. It was destroyed for inhospitality. The two stories stand in stark contrast to each other. Abraham and Sarah welcoming and feeding the strangers, and the town of Sodom, in spite of Lot's hospitality, looking to humiliate and banish the aliens to their city. Once again, the lesson even to today is that we are to show warmth to all who come and to invite them to stay because by doing so, we too might be showing hospitality to angels without knowing it.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey