

Hospitality and God
8 Pentecost, Proper 11C, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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All of us here, in one way or another, are influenced by and committed to the Benedictine value of hospitality. Today's Scripture invites us to an exciting consideration; our most important guest, every day, is God! That reality evolves, beginning with a story from *Genesis*. Abraham is resting in an already sacred space at the oaks of Mamre. Three angelic beings approach him. The scripture says right away that God is the visitor; I'm not certain Abraham knows that for sure, but he seems to. I've never seen anyone more excited to have unexpected guests! He is absolutely eager; he runs to meet them, bows down to the ground. He urges them to remain so water can be brought to wash their feet; then he wants them to wait while he has a major meal prepared: he hastens to Sarah and asks that she quickly make cakes; he runs to select a calf, then hastens to the servant for him to prepare it. When all is ready, he adds curds and milk. And then with ultimate hospitality, he respectfully stands to the side while they eat.

Sarah's response is a little different; her hospitality to God is in the form of disbelief. When she overhears God's promise that she will have a child by the time they return, she breaks into derisive laughter; she knows she's too old for that! Then she hears God ask her husband, **"Why did Sarah laugh... is anything too wonderful for the Most High God?"** She becomes a little fearful, and denies her laughter. But God says, **"Oh yes, you did laugh."** Notice: God will have none of her dishonesty, and yet sticks by the promise; Sarah will have a son.

Abraham eagerly receives, Sarah disbelieves, and God encounters both, right where they are. And together they grow in their adventure with God..

Jesus' drop-in visit with Martha and Mary is a little different. He is their friend. And yet, they've seen and heard enough to know, or almost know, this is God in Christ. At least they know He is special. Still, their responses are different, one from the other. Martha is Martha; a guest comes, no matter who, and she gets task-oriented, wanting to provide the most hospitable, generous meal, she can. Shades of Abraham, but with an edge; she has second thoughts. Mary, her sister, sitting at Jesus' feet, is included with the disciples, giving Jesus her full attention. Martha thinks she should get busy and help her. Jesus disagrees; Mary **"has chosen the better part,"** He says.

It's important to note, Jesus did not say Mary is a better person, just that she is making the better choice for her in this moment. In fact, Martha is being Martha, and Mary is being Mary, and Jesus meets each one exactly where she is. He encounters Martha with honesty and a word of wisdom, just as God did with Sarah. And He allows Mary to continue just as she is, as God did with Abraham.

Martha is busy, Mary is listening. Together they provide welcome, each in her own way, and Jesus meets each one where she is. And together, they, too, grow in their adventure with God.

So now it's our turn. Let's hear Paul addressing the Colossians:

**To them God chose to make known
how great among the Gentiles are the riches
of the glory of this mystery,
which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

"Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ is in all of us. The thing is, we have the choice every single day to be hospitable to Christ. To God in us. And to Christ in each other!

Wherever we are, we have the choice to welcome God in every person, and in fact, in all of God's creation.

Abraham and Sarah and Martha and Mary reveal at least two basic features about welcoming God that can help us in our daily choosing:

First: God initiates all encounters with God; our job is to respond. Remember, God comes to people right where we are, often interrupting us, always wanting welcome....Abraham and Sarah were at their tent, Martha and Mary at home. Paul tells us Christ already is within us! I wonder if we even realize that our day-by-day choices are either making Christ welcome in our souls, or not... a significant question, I think.

Second: God seems to have a message for each person, relevant in the moment; to Abraham, God announces when his child by Sarah will come; then God reminds Sarah to trust; miracles are of God. Martha gets a gentle correction about prioritization, while Mary is instantly incorporated into the community of disciples. In the same way, God is speaking with each of us and all of us together; like those who precede us, we simply are asked to listen, trusting that God is speaking...and then, to respond.

God is here, right now, and we are invited to welcome God into our very souls. That's what our eucharist is about. Being encountered by Christ and receiving, welcoming Him. Today, we might be eager with Abraham, or disbelieving with Sarah; we might be distracted with Martha, or listening intently, with Mary. Or something else. No matter, God is here, and together, like those who have gone before, we too are growing in our adventure with God. May we be thankful; may we trust, together and personally, in the gift and promise of true hospitality... to God... and to all God's creation. Amen.