

" Radical Welcome – Surprise Hospitality"

I grew up in a rural area where we could tell the time based on the traffic. First shift. Second shift. There would be a rush of vehicles roaring down the tar and chip road - and then it would be silent again for hours.

So when someone drove down the road in the heat of the day between shift changes... there was great suspicion.

Sometimes I could tell who it was before their car came into view. Cars have different sounds to their engines. "Grandmas coming!" or "Dad forgot something!"

But then... there were the Jehovah's Witnesses. They drove different cars. They tended to come on Easter Sunday, but also at random days and times.

My brother and I liked to pretend we were deer. So when a new car came down the road and pulled into our drive we froze wherever we were like deer do. We stared. Like deer. We tried to wear big-eyed stunned expressed like deer too. It embarrassed my mother to no end. Did people think she was raising a herd of feral children who'd never seen a car before? And worse - if we were deer-kid-statues in the yard, she couldn't pretend no one was home! She'd have to make small talk and be neighbourly.

She'd be all polite, get the evangelism tract, see them off. And my brother and I would return to running around barefoot and fancy free.

Never once did she order my brother to kill one of our cows and for me to help her make fifty pounds of bread. We never washed the feet of the strangers, or stood by to serve them.

What do you do when unexpected company comes by? Especially unexpected strangers? Does it make you feel stressed? Threatened? Curious or excited?

Today we can call 9-1-1 if there's trouble. But Abraham absolutely could not. Nor could travelers across the wilderness. Scripture has no word for hospitality, but it is a value shown over and over again.

The travelers need food, water, rest. Abraham has these things.

But they are strangers and could bring knives, theft, death.

The travelers are potential allies, powerful themselves or related to someone powerful. But they will take limited resources.

Yet there is honour to be gained... for both parties.

And conflict to be avoided... for both parties.

So when three strangers arrive on Abraham's door step... er... tent step... a dance of honor and face-saving and being-neighbourly begins.

It's a more formal and complicated version of my mother realizing the Witnesses have witnessed her grubby kids and now she has to make small talk. But why does she HAVE to? Honour.

Culture. Saving face. And Abraham and the strangers now have to address honour, culture, and saving face.

So here it goes: one day, old man Abraham is resting at the doorway of his tent as the heat of the day washes over the land. This is his ally Mamre's land - who helped him rescue his nephew Lot. He is in a grove of alone, squat shrubby oaks; one of only two species of trees to grow in this hot area. Nearby is his altar to God.

Like a heat mirage, three men appear before Abraham. Without knowing their names, or peoples, or reason for being here, Abraham rushes out into the heat. He could rush out to kill them, but honour and culture say to offer hospitality.

Abraham (who has all the shelter, food, and water) lies down, bowing, before the strangers. He then calls them "Lord," and himself "servant." He gives them honour since it is dishonourable to be needing shelter and food. He says to them, "My lords, if I find favour with you, please don't pass your servant by! Let me bring you a little water, allow me to wash your feet, and let me offer you rest beneath the oak. Do let me give you a little bit of bread! And once you're refreshed, you could continue on your way - this would be just a little visit to your servant."

Have you seen Disney's "Beauty and the Beast"? Abraham has just sang, "Be my guest, be my guest! Put my service to the test!"

Will... the strangers accept? Will they give Abraham honour by being his guests? Will they at least pass by and not murder the old man and steal his everything?

"Do as you have said." The strangers reply. Yes. They accept this invitation to being a guest.

Abraham doesn't ask them what they are up to. He doesn't ask where they are going. He just sees people in the middle of the hot day and decides to radically offer them comfort. This is culturally expected, and is a wise choice to avoid a possible battle between two groups of strangers.

But then the story gets... Biblical. Weird. Over the top. Now, strangers meet all the time. All the time people have to decide how they are going to negotiate this encounter. But in this story, Abraham goes full hog--er--full cow with surprising welcome. He tells his elderly wife to get 3 measures of flour ready into cakes. I was thinking... 3 measuring cups. But the Hebrew word is *seah*. Which is more like 9 quarts. So three sets of 9 quarts of flour... we're looking at 40 lbs or 18 kilograms of flour alone.

Now add water. We're at 67 lbs / 30 kg of dough.

And she has to knead all this!

And let it rise!

And bake it!

The Bible study group just finished reading A Year of Biblical Womanhood. We read how Rachel Held Evans made her challa bread with a clean storage tote resting in her tub to give it enough room to rise. What did Sarah do?

How many people had to help her get this ready? And how many days?

Meanwhile, Abraham has taken a calf to be butchered and passed it off to a slave boy. So 500 lbs / 227 kgs of live weight- with 250 lbs / 114 kg of edible meat. Which also has to be butchered and cleaned and prepared and cooked.

And milk.

And cheese curds.

This extravagant, over the top, massive feast is then offered to these strangers. And Abraham waits on them himself.

Talk about extravagant welcome! Growing up, extravagant welcome was offering strangers the indoor restroom and a plastic cup of water. We sure didn't start the grill and literally wait on strangers hand and foot.

In a normal situation, the strangers would now have to attempt to pay back Abraham's hospitality so they keep face. Maybe they'd say, "Dave here is third cousin to the lord of Big Town. We'll put in a good word for you." Or "We're poor as can be, but Sam here has a daughter who could be married to your son."

But the strangers ask, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

Uh - wait - they weren't introduced to Sarah. And she is not someone being offered for their hospitality. We're entering dangerous territory again.

But they speak a blessing upon her - she will birth a son. A big blessing for an old man who hasn't any kids but wants them. Sarah laughs. She wants kids too, but who are these strangers to think they can just magically make an old couple conceive?

The strangers stop hinting and tip their cards, show their identity, "Is anything too wonderful for YHWH? When the time is right, I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Freaked out - terrified - I mean, I sure would be if I realized I had just fed God, laughed at God, and still had God sitting in my tent - afraid, Sarah denies saying she laughed.

But God doesn't punish her laughter. God does as God has promised. And the happy, elderly, parents name the baby Laughter. And Sarah said, "God brought me Laughter! Everyone who hears this story will laugh with me." And Laughter, which in Hebrew is Isaac, grew up with his parents.

Did God reward Abraham and Sarah with Laughter because of their hospitality?

Or did God already intend this blessing because God knew the kind of welcoming people Abraham and Sarah are?

Did Abraham suspect these weren't just any three travelers when he threw them a feast?

Or did he throw a feast for every stranger who arrived at his tent?

I don't know the answer to any of these questions. I do know this is one of several scriptural stories of entertaining strangers who turn out to be angels, or messengers of divine blessing.

Our second story now follows the strangers who are guests. Jesus sees there are so many who need healing, protection, and comfort. More needs than providers. So he asks his 12 closest friends to help.

He tells them to go relying on the hospitality of strangers, "Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff, for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave." In other words, as news of your healing spreads, the rich and famous will ask you to move to their homes. Don't. Stay with who first welcomed you in. Give them the honour.

He continued, "As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town." In other words, don't curse the places that turn you out. Just shake it off. Continue on.

He added, "Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town." Sodom and Gomorrah were leveled by God for their inhospitality and selfishness. Jesus reassures us that God will judge, it's not us. And God disapproves of hurting the vulnerable and sending away the needy.

We know that those who welcomed in the disciples welcomed in Jesus. They welcomed the reign of God among them. They received miraculous healings, a taste of the great banquet of God's heaven, and they encountered holiness - tangible, touchable, present holiness in their daily lives and homes.

Abraham welcomed strangers who were angels.

They welcomed strangers who were apostles.

I wonder who we welcome in. There is danger with it - oh absolutely. To ourselves. To our resources. To culture. You hear a lot right now about welcoming refugees and immigrants; or about "re-migration" and deportation. You hear a lot about their food stinks, they wear funny clothes, they don't worship like we do, they ain't one of us.

None of this is new. Every generation, every nation, every city, every house - now all the way back to prehistoric Abrahamic times - all of us are always negotiating encountering the stranger. All of us are trying to sort out who is the In-Group and who is the Other.

It's human.

Jesus' invitation is to leave the sorting to God. Instead, to counter our instincts of division and embrace the theology of "All." All are God's. We are God's. All are loved. My enemies are loved. I am loved. All.

And let me tell you... that's against our instincts. As a human, I **like** having MY team. My clan. I like knowing "These are MY people!" My people are more based in special interests, or values, than race or religion. But I still am cliquish. We all are. It is human.

Jesus' offer is to take his not-human power, that power of love, and to dare hospitality and love outside our comfort zones. Outside of our groups and networks. To travel with peace, offer peace, live in peace -- and leave the judgement to God.

To be radically hospitable. Surprisingly welcoming. To be blessings to all we meet.

It's a challenge! But is anything too wonderful for YHWH? And just who do you think empowers your hospitality and love? The answer, of course, is nothing is impossible with God!

May we lean into God's power to welcome all with peace and love! May we embrace the stranger, and in doing so, we may just entertain God's messengers. Amen.

Scripture Readings – June 14, 2026 – for Little Current United Church PC

Genesis 18: 1-15 NRSV A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ 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.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Genesis 21: 1-7 The Birth of Isaac

21 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. ² Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." ⁷ And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Matthew 9:35-10:8 The Harvest Is Great, the Laborers Few

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The Twelve Apostles

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles:

first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

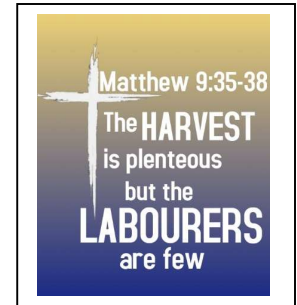
The Mission of the Twelve

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

May God’s spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts

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For Little Current United Church – June 14, 2026

### **What I Learned in Ottawa**

My trip to Ottawa gave me a firsthand look at how government works and the importance of advocating for issues that matter. I had the opportunity to meet Members of Parliament, a senator, journalists, and political staff.

One of the highlights was meeting Elizabeth May, who shared her views on climate change and emphasized the importance of hope in addressing environmental challenges. I also spoke with Leah Gazan, who discussed the role of Indigenous communities in climate action and the importance of ensuring their voices are heard.

I attended discussions on Bill C-241, a proposed bill related to floods and droughts, as well as a Senate committee meeting and Question Period in the House of Commons. These experiences helped me better understand how Parliament operates.

My favourite part of the trip was meeting Eric Hébert-Daly, who taught us effective lobbying and communication strategies. I later used those skills when speaking with Shannon Miedema about supporting unhoused people affected by climate change.

Overall, the trip showed me that there is still a lot of work to be done on climate change and supporting vulnerable communities. I hope to use what I learned in Ottawa to help make a positive difference in my community.

