



Sermon Transcription • Romans 12:13-16 (NIV)

## Hospitality

Pastor Mark Burch

**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

So if I haven't met you, I am one of the new guys. We joined staff here in July 1st. And I'm the token old guy on the preaching staff. I understand the history on it. The elders felt there should be *some* maturity in the pulpit around this church, so... they hired an old guy. So I joined the team. But you know, I do need to acknowledge that there are a couple of guys in the staff that are far older than I am. We have some elderly guys on the team. There is Johnny Markin, there is Ron Friesen, and then we have our token octogenarian, Vic Schellenberg. If you've not seen him wandering with his walker around the back hallways... he's actually back in West Court now you can go back there and pat him on the head and welcome Vic to our team. Anyway, it's great to be with you.

We are in the book of Romans. We're studying together the scriptures. If you're new to Northview, welcome here. Last night I met three new families and this morning already one new family, the first week into Northview. So we know that there are always new people coming. And gonna intro this series a little bit for those of you who are new. Because we're actually in a multi-year series in the book of Romans, taking in chunks. So it's important for us to do that.

But my role around here is simply the church planting guy. There's a fancier title for it, but it is to direct the church planting vision of the church. And as we are researching and interviewing and looking at other models across North America of churches that are planting churches, you need to know that this is a fairly new thing or unique thing. The most recent report I read said that 93%—get that number—93% of North American Evangelical churches will never daughter another church. That's a shocking statistic when you think about it. If we're gonna reach our nation and the best way to reach the nation is through healthy churches and churches aren't planting churches. So we want to be on about that. And then churches that are doing multiple churches and so the vision that the elders have brought to us and Pastor Jeff has brought to us, is to literally raise up hundreds of church planters over the next couple decades and hopefully influencing entire nation for the gospel of Jesus. So would you continue to pray into that. Pray that God raises up young leaders and that we can come alongside help equip and train them, send them out. And just continue to pray in that.

But that is not our focus for this weekend. We are in Romans. And I'm going to ask you to stand together with me, so just go ahead and stand. And we're gonna read this together. Now last night when I said, "We're gonna read it together." I started reading, and the dumb people at Saturday night



just stood there. And I'm like, "No. We're gonna read this *together*." So we're going to read this *together*, alright? So right along with me, good and loud. Romans 12:9-21, [reading aloud with the congregation]

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

So let's pray together. Jesus, would you speak to us and Holy Spirit would you open the eyes of our heart to understand. I pray for men and women in this room who need a message from you today and you have this amazing ability to take the Word of God and to apply it to the very needs of like a thousand people sitting here. You know the specific circumstances they come from. You know what they need to hear from you today. So Father, as we open your Word, as we look at it, as we want to be taught and challenged by it, we pray that there would be an application for each one of us. We acknowledge that there is an enemy that wants to snatch away the Word. And so together we stand against him in the name of Jesus. And we ask Lord, would you rebuke him over this place. That this would literally be a place set apart. That it would be a holy place, where we can be with you and we can hear your Word. And the enemy has no right and no authority in this room. And so we declare it as holy ground. And we ask you to speak to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Alright, well grab a seat. We're gonna dive in. We have a ton of material to cover. And it is going to be a quick and a fast walk through. But if you're new, as I mentioned earlier, you are coming into a long discussion. Literally a multi year discussion in this book. Romans is Paul's greatest work. It was called his *magnum opus*. This 16 chapters, it is a deep theological book. It is dense, it is heavy. Many of our church leaders in history trace their conversion stories to the book of Romans; Martin Luther, specifically, father of the Reformation movement. And 200 years later, John Wesley in reading Luther's account of Romans finds his heart stirred and comes to faith in Christ. And yet it is a long book. So we've broken it into sections. So literally if you haven't been around Northview for like three or four



years, you've missed the first chunk of the book. And it's like coming into the middle of the movie. And if you've ever done that, if you've had somebody join you in the middle of the movie, and they keep asking these annoying questions. It's like "Who's this character? What's he on about? What's the storyline?" And you're like, "Would you please just...[you wanna say it,] just shut up? And we can rewind the movie and you can watch it from the beginning. Or watch it yourself. But don't come into the middle of the movie and ask all these questions." So we're starting really, three quarters of the way into this book. So if you've missed the early stuff, I want to quickly give you a review. Just the highlight reel. The high points of the first 11 chapters because the last 5 chapters that we're studying this year are based on those first 11. They could be subtitled "How then shall we live?" First 11 are deeply theological, and the last 5 are deeply practical, "How then shall we live?"

So chapter 12 starts with this phrase, "I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God..." And anytime you see that word, "therefore", you always ask: what is it there for? By the mercies of God, by all that's gone before, I appeal to you, crawl up on this altar daily your life as a living sacrifice. But the fast forward review is this. The first three chapters of this book basically say, the Coles Notes would be this: all humanity is helpless and hopeless outside a relationship to Jesus Christ. All humanity. He talks about rebellious people, he talks about respectable irreligious secular people. And he even talks about religious people. In fact, the religious people may be the most lost of all. Because they actually think they know something, but they don't. Outside relationship to Jesus, we're all lost. Naturally none of us go looking for God. And so God comes looking for us in Christ Jesus, is what those first three chapters say.

And then you might ask the question, "Well how does that happen?" And chapter four says, "It happens the way it has always happened. It happens by faith and faith alone." Faith in Jesus Christ alone. And the quote there is from Abraham's life story. Romans 4:3,

"Abraham believed God [Abraham placed his faith in God, he believed], and it was credited to him as righteousness."

And that whole chapter goes on. It wasn't about his works, it wasn't about what he did, he prayed enough, gave enough, served enough. But he believed God, he trusted God. He placed his faith in God.

Then chapters five to eight, that chunk in the middle. Both chapter five and chapter eight, begin with the word "therefore" as well. Because of what's gone before, this is how we live. We have peace with God. We have a new standing with God. We have been given the power of God by the Spirit of God to live out this life. Sin no longer has power over us. See even though we struggle and we come up against the enemy of our souls. For those who are in Christ Jesus, chapter eight—this triumphant chapter—there is no condemnation for us. And nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And then someone might ask, "Well how do we know that for certain? I struggle with that idea. That I can be separated from God. I might lose my salvation. I might fall away from him. He might lose his



grasp on me.” And chapters nine to eleven answers that question. What assurance do we have? Well the assurance is this, because it’s God who chose you in the first place. And so it’s God’s doing, not your doing. It’s not you coming to him and earning your way in, it is God who has this confident grip on your life and so when Paul writes to the Philippians, he says, Philippians 1:6,

“...being confident of this [very thing], that he [Jesus Christ] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

It’s God’s work. So you can have full assurance. That’s why chapter eight ends with that confident plea. *Nothing* can separate me from the love of God. Cause I can’t separate myself, cause he himself has made a covenant with me to keep me to the end. Now I know we’re not Pentecostal, but once in a while you can go “Woo hoo!” or “Amen!” or something.

Reminding you of all of this, because you’re coming into the middle of the movie. And so we’re coming into chapter 12, and we have just passed the high point of this story line. The antagonist has been exposed and the antagonist in this book is actually us. It’s our rebellion, it’s our self reliance, it’s our arrogance, it’s our pride, it’s our egos, and it’s all been laid bare before a Holy God. And the protagonist, the hero of the story, the champion of our faith, Jesus has been put on full display. What we were powerless to accomplish, he accomplishes. So like any good movie, the background music is swelling, the loud, it’s loud and dramatic, it’s stirring your emotions. We’ve come to the high point of the story, and you get to the end of chapter 11, and Paul is coming out of his skin, and he’s like, Romans 11:33-36,

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
“Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?”  
“Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?”  
For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

And then he’s like, he takes a deep breath <big sigh>. He’s gotta breath. He’s writing away furiously. And this long pause, and he’s like, “Therefore my friends... therefore my beloved brethren...therefore...therefore...therefore...I appeal to you, I plead with you, I beg with you, based on these 11 chapters, based on everything we’ve seen of the mercy of God, I plead with you...get up on that altar as a living sacrifice.”

And I’ve taken all this time to review because unless we understand two things: the depths of our sin and the deeper depths of God’s grace. The depth of our sin and the deeper depths of God’s grace. Unless we truly grasp those two concepts, then God’s mercy, is sorta like just a garnish off on the



dining table. You know that thing that they put on in the restaurant? And you wonder what's this green thing on my plate? It looks nice, it adds some colour, but it's really not really that important. But to see my sin swallowed up in the victory of Jesus is to cry, "Glory!" And then with mercy in full view, then we ask the questions of chapter 12: How then shall we live our lives? Because if it is not in response to mercy, if it's simply becomes another heavy to-do list, you would read chapter 12 and you read these verses in particular, verses 9 through 21, and it is like this bullet point list of "Do this, do this, do this, do this, do this." And you're like, "There you go. You Christians with all your do's and don'ts list once again." It's a long list of all...—No! It's not a to-do list, it's a response to the mercy of God. A response to the love of God.

So Paul writes to a handful of Christians. Get this in your mind, Rome, he writes to a handful of Christians living in the greatest city on Earth at that time, the greatest empire on Earth at time, Rome. The capital city which, there's speculation around it, but certainly at least half a million people maybe a million people, some think the first city to reach a million people in world history. And how many Christians are there so far? They've been converted at Pentecost most likely, moved back to Rome, a few hundred? Maybe a few thousand? And to put it in context, it would be like writing to the church in Ottawa. The church in Washington, D.C. Or more specifically, the church in Moscow. The church in Baghdad. The church in Beijing. Under hostile governments, and you have a tiny little group of Christians and they're asking the question: "How then shall we live our lives?" And "How will we make an impact on our great city and on our nation?" "How can we as a tiny little fringe group on the edges of society make any difference whatsoever?" And number one, in chapter one, it was because of the power of the gospel. It is the power of the gospel that changes people's lives. Not you and me! So we cling to the gospel of Jesus. But secondly, it is not just the message, but also the power of your lives. That your lives lived out as a counter cultural movement. Little by little, one relationship at a time, this counter cultural way of living alongside your friends and your neighbours, a life that is characterized by how you love and serve. It's Jesus' principles, the little mustard seed that grows into this huge tree. Or the little bit of yeast so that you put into that dough and it leavens the whole loaf.

And so for several weeks, we're looking at Romans 12:19-21. And today we have just four short verses in the middle. Verses 13 to 16 are our focus. And it is like this bullet point, drop down list, staccato notes; but the overarching imperative of this whole chunk, if you're scanning through your scripture, your Bibles with me, verse 9 is the overarching theme. Romans 12:9,

"Love must be sincere."

Love must genuine. Love must be real. It's sort of like the umbrella statement, and all these other statements fall under that life of love. But verse 13 to 16, our focus, by *my* count, has seven positive statements and three negative statements. Seven positive statements and three negative. This is wonderful. Ten potential topics. Now I just need to mention this, that last weekend, Jeff—that schmuck—took three [audience laughs]. He had three topics and he took forty three minutes. I have ten topics, you can do the math.



Seven do's and three don't's. Do: share, practice hospitality, bless, rejoice, mourn, live in harmony, associate with the lowly. Don't: curse, be proud, or be conceited. Now obviously we don't have time to do an in depth study. But I want to run through the text and I really want to drill down on one in particular, and I'll just fast forward to the end and tell you where we're going. This concept of an open table, an open life, an open heart, an open home, an open door that Christians, marked by radical hospitality, live lives that say to the world, "Welcome to my table. We welcome others into our lives, into our community and into our faith. And literally into our personal lives *because* of what Jesus Christ has done for every one of us. That when we were strangers. When we were his enemies, Jesus opened the table to us. He invited us in." It's significant that this message happens to land on communion weekend when we are coming to the Lord's table—a symbol of his welcome into his family. He's inviting us into his family. And even today he's inviting you into his family. And if you've never respond to that invitation or maybe you've never heard that invitation, the Lord is saying to you "I want to welcome you to my table." And it is not just having a meal together, but it is literally sharing our lives. So that's where we're headed.

But let's look at each phrase and we're gonna fly. So hang on. Verse three—verse thirteen rather, admonishes us, Romans 12:13,

"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

Those two phrases. And the two parts are certainly connected, but they are also distinct. Sharing with the Lord's people, in some translation say, "sharing with the saints", is clearly focused on the care and concern that Christians have for one another, the saints—the brothers and sisters in Christ. And underneath that imperative, there's an implication. Why would we be caring for the needs of one another? The implication is something that we have, very basically, we all hold in common is that from time to time, in our lives, all of us...from time to time in our lives, all of us, every person in this room—men, women, boys and girls—will face a time when you need a helping hand. All of us face these seasons of life. And as brothers and sisters we come alongside to help in times of need. And this principle of sharing and specifically it refers to our generosity. The sharing of our lives, but literally the sharing of our resources. And so many examples in the scriptures. Just a couple, when the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost, one of the first things that stood out about that early church was their radical generosity towards one another. It said, there were no needy people among them. Literally some people sold real estate and took those proceeds and gave it to the church so that there would be no poor among them.

Last weekend, we took a care offering which we do several times a year. It's a second offering over and above the regular budget of the church for the operations and the programs and the day to day ministries we do, a special fund—designated fund, that is set aside as a church family specifically to help families who are in times of need and crisis, helping them. It might be something like, helping them get some counselling, or paying their rent, or a hydro bill, or buying groceries for them. Most of us have been on both: the giving and the receiving end. Most of us have.





As I was thinking this through, I remembered and I did the math on it. And I realized, hokey dinah, it's thirty years ago. It is thirty years ago this winter, how time flies. But I remember it palpably as though it were yesterday. We were a young married couple, we were living in Chilliwack at the time, and I was trying to eek out a living and support our little family by pouring concrete. For those of you who have any memory that I do, or maybe were in construction, you might remember the winter of '89-90, was one of those rare winters we get in the Fraser Valley, from where the end of November to the first week in January, the temperature didn't get above zero. It's one of those rare winters that we rarely get. But if you're an outdoor concrete placer, and concrete is not flowing when the temperature's below zero. And we were literally living, literally living, not paycheque to paycheque, we were living job to job to job. We had just our third little baby, and I remember specifically sitting with my wife, and crying and saying to her, "Honey we don't even have money to buy toothpaste, yet alone feed these three little kids, O God how are we gonna survive this?" And I remember the day there was a knock on our townhouse door. And we went to the door and there was nobody there. But there was a pile of grocery bags. And we brought those grocery bags in and we loaded them in the pantry, and there was literally enough food there to feed our family for several weeks. Caroline took a photo of it and we still have that photo tucked away somewhere to remind us of that provision. Later, I got a phone call from our landlord. And he said, "You just need to know, somebody they want to remain anonymous, but somebody has paid your rent for December. So don't need to worry about that." I can tell you as a young married couple in our mid 20's, we were so humbled, it is very humbling. But we were also overwhelmed and blessed by the generosity of God's people who came alongside for...It was literally a six week little window.

Dear friends at Rome, dear friends in Abbotsford, your generosity toward those who are in need will cause you to stand out because we live in a selfish world. So saints, care for the needs of other saints. But the text says, "Not just the saints." It says, "Practice hospitality." Now that word is interesting. Because that word literally means "Open your life up to the stranger." Make the stranger into friends, and into family. The word "hospitality" literally, we don't often put Greek words up on the screen. But let's put this one up [video: 20:45], *phileoxenos*, it's a compound word, and it's important. Because it comes from two greek words: *phileo* "brotherly love" and *xenos* which is "stranger". Love of the stranger is what the word "hospitality" means literally translated. And oh how our world needs this. Because today its opposite is well known: xenophobia [video: 21:00]. In fact, that's a Greek word that we actually transliterate into English. We use the word xenophobia as an English word. And it is a compound of two different words: *xenos* "stranger" and *phobia* "fear". Fear of the stranger. The Oxford Dictionary says [video: 21:18],

"Xenophobia is a deep rooted fear towards foreigners."

Wikipedia, that fashion of academic excellence, defines xenophobia this way, "It is the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange." Xenophobia—you fear lots of stuff. Something's strange, children fear broccoli right? It looks strange. Until you can get them to taste it with lots of cheese. They fear it. It's strange. Xenophobia can involve perceptions of an in group towards an out group. And can manifest itself in suspicions of the activities of others and a desire to eliminate their



presence. What are those people doing here? And may relate to a fear of losing national or ethnic or racial identity. Does any this sound familiar to you at all?

Let me stretch your mind just a little bit to suggest that the word “hospitality” as we use it typically now in our modern English language has lost most of its original intent. Because hospitality rightly understood, hospitality biblically understood, has to be distinguished from merely entertaining guests and it also has to be distinguished from Christian fellowship. All three are important, but all three are different. We need to differentiate between these three terms. And all three can actually be present at the same time if we’re intentional. But much of what we Christians call “hospitality” is actually just entertaining and maybe fellowship. So stay with me, you see, it’s possible for a group of Christians to get together at someone’s house, and have a great meal, and maybe you play a board game, or you watch the Grey Cup, or you talk about weather or the coming election or the economy, and you have a great time together as a group of Christians. But you can’t really call it “fellowship”, because fellowship is centred around Jesus Christ. And if Jesus never came up in that conversation, then that truly wasn’t fellowship it was just good entertainment for the evening. On the other hand, a group of Christians could get together. Your care group, or just a random group of Christian friends that you invite over, and you get together and you do indeed share in both the personal and spiritual level. And then someone at the end of the night, may go “Man... that was great hospitality, wasn’t it?” Not really. Because hospitality, to take the word literally, the welcoming of the stranger, is only hospitality if the Christian’s friends come over and actually broaden the circle to include some outsiders. When the outsiders are included, then we can call it “hospitality”. So according to the original meaning, it is to welcome the stranger. Now let that thought like an irritating grain of sand just in the pearl of your mind. Just hold it there. We’re gonna come back to it.

Romans 12:14, we get a positive and a negative, we get a positive and its opposite.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

And this imperative is probably the easiest to trace directly to Jesus. 1 Peter 2 and 3, couple verses. Peter says this, 1 Peter 2:23,

“When they hurled their insults at him [speaking of Jesus], he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”

1 Peter 3:9,

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”

Both the positive and the negative are needed. And I think actually most of us have learned to handle the “don’t curse” thing all right. We’ve learned that just because somebody curses you, you don’t have to curse back. Just cause somebody gives you the finger on the freeway you don’t have to give them





the finger back. We're okay with not cursing back. But it's the second statement that is much harder. Because when they curse you, not just that you don't curse them, but that you actually *bless* them in return. And the word "blessing" is the word that we get the English word "eulogy" from. Now eulogies we typically think are what happens at funerals. The word "eulogy" is to praise. And so at a funeral, we praise the person. After they're dead, we say lots of nice things about them. We remember all, but we should practice this before people die. Let me tell you all the nice things, cause you're gonna die. So let me tell you all the nice things about you before you die. But are we eulogizing? Are we blessing even our enemies or our critics?

Paul is saying to this little group of Christians, you want to make a difference in the capital city? You want to make a difference in Abbotsford? You want to make a difference in British Columbia? You want to make a difference in Canada? You want to see the empire changed? Then start by becoming people who are known as blessers, not cursers. What if all of us went out of this room and say, "This week our one assignment is to bless the community." No words of cursing, not a single word of cursing is allowed this week. Only blessing! Blessing, blessing, blessing. You see our world is filled with curses and complainers and cynics. Have you met any of them? They specialize in telling us what's wrong with the world.

I love political history. Theodore Roosevelt's one of my favourite U.S. presidents. A hundred years ago, in giving a speech, he used these words,

"It is not the critic who counts [that one line is just worth it. Just right there. By the book. **It is not the critic who counts**]; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better [*<in mocking voice> "He should've done it differently"*]. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Now I'm like, "Woo!! Go Teddy!" We need a speech like that today. It is not the critic that counts. Oh the need in North American Christian is not for another voice of condemnation. But a voice of blessing.

One of the things we do around here each week, and it's fun. I've been leaning in on this the last couple weeks. Is we critique the young preachers. That's so fun to rip them apart, given what I just said. No, seriously, these young teachers and preachers, Sunday night service and mid week at Youth and Young Adults, and they're video taped. And over the course of the year, there's 10 or 12 of them, they're each getting critiqued by their peers at least three or four times through the year. So this last week, we're critiquing Colin Fast, at Sunday evening service. And he is preaching an early September. And in his message there's this one line that I took offence at. I took question mark to. He said this line, he said, "On Twitter, Christians are known for their hatred." Now I'm not on Twitter very much, I



signed up years ago and it just overwhelmed me. The amount of stuff coming through... so I just rarely. Unless somebody sends me a link, I'll look at it. But I'm really rarely on it. And I didn't think that was actually true. So I'm like, I'm taking him out. At critique, I'm like, Colin, that's wrong. But I asked the question in that room of young adults, "Are Christians really known on Twitter for their hatred?" And around the room, the heads were all going like this [nodding]. And if that is true, then we have to ask ourselves, <loud voice> "How did this happen?" If that is true, we should be saying, "How on earth did that happen?" When did we decide that the best way to change the world is by ripping it apart? </voice> Those of you who are old like me will remember chorus we used to sing, sang it in church. <singing "The Longer I Serve Him">

"The longer I serve Him the sweeter He grows;  
The more that I love Him more love He bestows.  
Each day is like Heaven, my heart overflows.  
The longer I serve Him the sweeter He grows. "

It was a great chorus. But should it not also be true? That the longer I serve *Him*, the sweeter *I* grow? That I become more gracious, that I become more winsome, if grace has really taken root in my life, if I have seen what all God has done for me, his mercy, his grace...all of the first 11 chapters of Romans should we not be the most winsome, encouraging, blessing people on the planet? Why do you look so uncomfortable? Like are you all a bunch of cynics or critics? Be blessers. Smile.

Let's just touch verse 15. Romans 12:15,

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

And again, the words roll off our lips so easily. But have we stepped deeply into that challenge? Because in our culture of comparison and competition, and our culture where an online image seems to be more important than the substance of our life. Can we genuinely rejoice with those who are rejoicing instead of envying or competing? And what if we genuinely practice rejoicing with those who rejoice?

And secondly, that trait of mourning well. And being people who enter into the mess of other people's lives. You see, our culture doesn't do mourning very well. We don't die well, we don't suffer well. I don't know how many of you like me, I like reading the obituaries. My wife thinks I'm a little morbid, but when we get on a plane, I ask for a newspaper, and I flip to the obituaries right away. I like to read those. If you're not in the obituaries, it's a good thing, cause I'm not here. It's great. Check it out. Increasingly you're seeing this line in obituaries: "No service at the request of the deceased." And what people are saying is "Just get rid of my body as quick as possible and get on with your lives. Forget about it." And yet memorials and funerals and standing by a family in the months that follow the loss of a loved one, walking with them through that grief or any grief in life, walking with a friend as they go through divorce. Or grieving with a neighbour who has a rebellious child or is addicted to drugs, or listening to your friend who's facing a surgery or praying with someone who has lost their job. You



see, these and so many other situations are so critical to life in a caring community. Spurgeon used to tell the young preachers, “If you preach to a grieving heart, you will never lack for an audience.” Because in every audience there is a grieving heart. And genuine Christian love is a love that doesn’t shy away from the messy things of life. The painful times of life. because in essence, it steps up alongside to say “No matter what you’re going through, I’m going to be here for you.” And we know the reciprocity, what’s that word that big word that I just tried? We know because it’s going to come back around. You know that song, “Lean on me, when you’re not strong? I’ll be your friend. I’ll help you carry on.” Why? Because it won’t be long ’til I’m gonna need somebody to lean on. So right now you can lean on me. Cause next week I might be the one leaning on you.

And finally we’re gonna lump the imperatives of verse 16 together with just a quick comment. It’s beautiful symphony of a diverse community. And it comes together in genuine love, where rich and poor, educated and not, young and old, married and single, men, women, boys and girls, are welcomed into the orchestra. That you bring your voice, you bring your instrument, you tune it to the lives of others, and Paul says, Romans 12:16,

“Live in harmony with one another.”

This great musical masterpiece of our lives and our loves, Romans 12:16,

“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”

Or as my mom used to say, “Don’t be too big for your breeches.” The church of Jesus. The church of Jesus when it is functioning like it *should* function, is a beautiful mosaic of society. It is the only place on Earth like it that I can think of. Maybe you know some, but I don’t know any other place on the planet, where you see such diversity in age, from a cradle roll that is bursting with newborns right up to people in their 90’s worshipping in the same service. Where else do you see a recovering addict and a millionaire? The single mom, the immigrant, the widow, the unemployed dad, the expectant mom, the musician, the athlete, the banker, the plumber, the scholar, the doctor, and the patient, the barista, and the farm hand, those who own dogs, and those who are owned by cats, red and yellow, black and white. We are all precious in his sight. Where else under the sun is anyone in their right mind trying to bring together such a motley crew like that and then asking them to live and love and serve and care for one another and the world around them? Where else are we attempting this? I know of no other place on Earth other than the gathered people of God that we call “the church”. And it is either a recipe for disaster, or it is the most beautiful melody that you can ever imagine. And Paul’s reminding us in view of God’s mercy, in light of all that Jesus has accomplished on our behalf, would you turn to each other with eyes of love and hearts of compassion with helping hands and willing minds, encourage *this* kind of community, friends at Rome, you tiny little remnant on the edge of the capital city, you can transform your city, if you live like this.

Okay, we gotta land the plane. But I want to circle back to that concept in verse 13: share with the saints, welcome the stranger. Just a couple of comments. Cause the focus changes midway through



that verse. And some commentators say literally it's a flip in the text as a whole. That the first half deals with primarily inside the church, and the second half outside the church. You can argue that; commentators vary in their opinions. But certainly a shift happens. Care for the saints and care for the outsider. Consider those who aren't part of the family. And I won't push it too far, cause you can argue it both ways.

But if the second half is to be seen through the eyes of the outsider, then I think it has an even greater impact especially in North America in 2019. Because we are living in these days right now, we are living in a massive worldwide shift. You've heard me preach in the summer I talked a little bit about this. We are moving from nationalism, from globalism rather, to isolationism and nationalism. The massive move towards globalization the last 60 to 80 years after World War II, where all governments decided that we are going to cooperate together to raise the standard of living around the globe for all peoples everywhere, we are tracking away from that now. And more and more cities, municipalities, nations and states, are electing governments that are pulling back from the global perspective to look after the needs of their own and *only* their own. And racism seems to be on the rise, and hostilities between the socioeconomic classes, the things that we see happening in Hong Kong and other places in the news. The classes are heating up. Special interest groups are demanding not only recognition of their agenda, but special treatment, acceptance, approval. And it seems that there's no segment of society that somehow is not a target on someone else's agenda for what is wrong with the world, "It's *you* people are wrong with the world."

And if there was ever a time that the Christian virtue of radical hospitality was needed, that time is now. Remember the true definition: welcoming the stranger. Not just entertainment and not just Christian fellowship. Both of those are important, but hospitality, one step further, to welcome the stranger. Opening our hearts, our lives, our homes, our churches to the outside. To the one who is yet to know the love of Jesus. And does that not by definition take us to the very heart of the gospel? Does that by definition not actually bring us right to this table right here? The very essence of hospitality is that when we were strangers, when we were alienated from him, when there was a barrier between us and the Lord that he came to us. He came and gave us his life to welcome us to his table. It goes to the very heart of the gospel. When we were opposed to him, his enemies literally, he *pursued* us. And have we truly consider the evangelistic power of that little word "hospitality"?

Probably the most powerful story in our day that I've heard is the story of Rosaria Butterfield. And I'm not gonna tell her whole story. Pastor Jeff has referred to her often. If you've not looked at her life, look at her life. It's inspiring. Her website introduces her in this way,

"Before Rosaria Butterfield became a popular Christian author, she was a tenured professor at Syracuse University, a lesbian feminist fighting to advance the cause of LGBTQ equality, and an *unlikely* convert [she was like the least, the last person you'd think that would come to faith in Christ]. In 1999, her life intersected with the gospel of Jesus Christ through a friend's radically ordinary *hospitality*. From hating Christians to becoming one, the transformation took place slowly and outside a church pew when the church came to her."



Now I won't tell her whole story. Just, if you want to know her story, Google "My Train Wreck Conversion", you'll find several testimonies where she shared in various conferences—about a 30 minute testimony. "My Train Wreck Conversion". And she shares this story of how she was actually attacking Christianity, but being a good scholar she wanted to study Christianity. She's like, "I can't write a book against Christianity unless I really know what it's all about. So I need to know a real life Christian." So she met this pastor and his wife, series of circumstances, and they invited her to come to their home for dinner. And over a period of two years, they just keep welcoming her into their home. Dinner after dinner, after dinner. Discussion after discussion, reading the Scriptures. But in her testimonies, she says, it's actually shocking when you hear them, cause she says, "For two years there were two things that they did not do over our dinner meals: they did not share the gospel with me and they did not invite me to church." And you're like, "Whaaaat!? Isn't that the very first thing that you would do?" And no, not with a woman in this position. Sharing the gospel and inviting her to church would just turn her off even more. For two years. Love, food, meals, conversations, and eventually the Holy Spirit began to warm her heart.

It's impossible for me to try to apply this principle to each of us. But I know that God will bring to your mind the names and faces of those that he wants you to welcome. We're gonna talk more about this in the coming weeks. Pastor Jeff next weekend is actually gonna talk about how do we welcome more people at Northview. Today actually we're having a "New to Canada Lunch". And if you're in the room, and you are new to Canada. I'm coming cause I'm new to Canada, it's 35 years ago, but I'm new to Canada. But if you're new to Canada, specifically in the last couple years or if English is your second language, we're having a lunch specifically to try to welcome you to our church. But beyond that, in the everyday ordinary of life. So if you're a long term Northview person, would you look around you and say, "Who's that person who might be new to Northview?" Who might be new to Abbotsford, who might be new to Canada, and would you take the time to welcome them? We're gonna be asking you in the months ahead, specifically some of you, we're gonna be asking you, would you do the hospitable thing and would you give up your preferred seat at your preferred time on a Sunday morning because we need more room for outsiders to come. We're gonna say, would you go to Saturday night? Would you go to East Abby? Would you go over to West Court? Would you give up these nice comfy seats Sunday morning? So that a stranger... We're two years out from a new building, so we gotta make some room for people. Jeff's gonna talk about that.

But we come to this table, and that's a good summary. Because the invitation to this table was as significant. Because in Eastern cultures, it was and it still is true to the day, that to come and eat at someone's table was far more than just an invitation to eat together. To put your feet under the table in an Eastern culture, even to the day, is an invitation to share your life. It's not just "Come and eat my good cooking" it's "I'm inviting you to share my life." And this table as we come about is just a little piece of bread, a sip of juice. It's not really a meal, it's a token. But it reminds us of the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. And he said, "Every time you do this, you're doing this in remembrance of me." But it's an invitation to come to this table. If you have never been invited to the table of Jesus, you need to know that he is inviting you. He has made the way for you. There's nothing you need to do



to get your ticket to this dinner. Jesus has given you the ticket. You just need to say “yes.” And maybe this weekend is the weekend where you go, “I finally understood that. I can’t pray enough, give enough, serve enough to earn his favour. It’s a gift. It’s like a dinner invitation. And I’m gonna say ‘yes’ cause everybody likes dinner at the Lord’s table.”

So let’s pray together. The worship team’s gonna come, the servers will come. And we’re gonna enter into the Lord’s table. So Father, thank you that you were the one who modelled hospitality to us in the first place. When we were your enemies and we’re far from you, you came looking for us. When we were strangers and we were alienated from you. The scriptures are filled with those terminologies. When we were foreigners, when we were living in exile, when we were captive to our sin, when we were in rebellion, when our own self reliance, whatever it was that kept us from you. In that condition, you didn’t leave us there. You didn’t say, “Well they can come to me if they want.” You actually pursued us. So Father if we take nothing else with us, maybe we walk out of these doors, in covenant with you, that we will be a welcoming community. That we will change our neighbourhoods, our city, our province, our nation through the simple act of opening our hearts and our lives to the stranger. And we ask that blessing in Jesus’ name, Amen.