



APRIL 2014

## PUBLIC FAITH AND THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

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BY JEFF WHITE

The way we use the word “hospitality” in English brings to mind party planning, celebratory events, or at the very least, cooking and cleaning in order to get ready for guests. But that the Bible’s understanding of the practice of hospitality among Christians is best understood as a way of life. In fact, it not only provides a remarkable window for understanding the beauty of the gospel, but is also a profound way of communicating and embodying the gospel to friends who do not share the same worldviews or beliefs.

The word “hospitality” literally means, “Showing kindness to or entertaining strangers.” Beginning in the Old Testament, God has called his people to show kindness to strangers in their midst: “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner

residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:18,19). The writer to the Hebrews implores, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (13:2). Throughout the Scriptures God uses the metaphors of hospitality to communicate what it means to know him. To experience his love is to have our souls satisfied with the richest of fare (Psalm 63) and he invites those of us who are thirsty to come to water and those without money to come and eat (Isaiah 55).

At the heart of the good news is the glorious truth that though we had become radically estranged from God, through Jesus’ costly death and resurrection, we

have been welcomed back into the Father’s presence. This is the news that we are to announce to the world, and how better than accompanied by lives that exude hospitality? And by demonstrating intentional hospitality to our friends that don’t consider themselves Christians is to demonstrate the love and welcome of God. “Welcome, embrace and accept one another, just as God in Christ has welcomed, embraced and accepted you” (Romans 15:7). Ours is an extravagantly hospitable God and we are to be his imitators.

While the practice of hospitality often will involve friends and family, it is most powerful when offered to the stranger and those who are different from us. Christine Pohl, who wrote *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian* (Continued on page 8)

## ACTING, IMPROV, AND PUBLIC FAITH

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BY TIM KELLER

On February 16 the Downtown Congregation sponsored an afternoon performance by the Improvised Shakespeare Company. The company takes a title or theme from the audience and then improvises a full Shakespearean play, complete with couplets, iambic pentameter, and the use of Shakespearean plot-lines. When asked for a title someone in the audience called out “Cat

food for Breakfast.” The company proceeded to improvise a multi-act play based on that unifying theme, bringing it to a satisfying and hilarious conclusion. Most of the people in the audience I talked to afterwards said they couldn’t remember the last time they laughed so long and hard.

After the performance the director, Blaine Swen, shared how his Christian faith shaped his work

as an actor and improv artist. He said “since Jesus has solved the big issues—he died on the cross for me—I am free to go on stage and have fun.” This is a powerful resource that all Christians have available for their work. We don’t go out on the stage or into the workplace trying to find ourselves, trying to justify our lives through our performance.

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# UNEXPECTED BLESSING POURED FROM YOUR CLOSETS

BY THE REDEEMER DIACONATE

The Redeemer Diaconate organized an event called Free Community Closet, designed for job-seeking women in need of professional clothing. Because of an outpouring of generosity from our congregation, the Diaconate cubicles were piled high with bags of clothing and donated suits that had been lovingly packaged on hangers by you. On Saturday, March 8, a group of over 30 women arrived at the Redeemer office to what looked like boutique explosion in our conference room: coats, jackets, suits, dresses, and everything in between. They cheerfully helped sort and set up a clothing shop out of hundreds of donated items.

After gathering for a prayer of praise and gratitude to our generous God, the ladies were reminded that those who know Jesus are already dressed in His best and that He sees us as beautiful already in Jesus. The vivid imagery from Isaiah 61:10, “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” moved many to tears. Then they shopped until they dropped and it was all “free indeed.” A professional stylist volunteered her expertise and helped

the ladies find the proper fit, gave style advice and wardrobe tips to an eager bunch wanting so much to get back to work in their new clothing.

Later our British DJ blasted runway tracks for the women to show off their clothes. Seeing the creativity as ladies expressed themselves on the catwalk in their new outfits was another highlight of the day! Everyone with the courage to model was entered into a lottery for the accessories. One woman said “[The Community Closet] was amazing and shows that God has not forgotten me.” Many were posing for one another in their new clothing or trading pieces. Having an event just for them helped them to cast their worries aside for one afternoon and to experience God’s provision for them in a very tangible way.

A mother who currently lives in a shelter with her children, due to domestic violence, said it was a welcome respite from the dreariness and challenge of her current situation and the Closet picked up her spirits and gave her back some dignity. She was overjoyed to find a parka that fit one of her rambunctious boy toddlers. Another lady shared, “Thank you for a happy and successful Community Closet. Loved the runway, music, sisterhood and fellowship not to mention the awesome new wine

colored interview suit! It boosted my confidence.” That dear sister has been feeling so low, but on the runway she was whirling and twirling and smiling with the rest of us.

We have not left out our spiritual brothers. We were blessed to have been recipients of a large donation from a Redeemer businessman who not only supplied a great deal of women’s clothing but also a load of cleaned and unclaimed men’s clothing from one of his dry cleaning stores that enabled us to hold a community closet for male job seekers a week after the women’s event.

We thank God for giving us the resources to organize “one-off” community closet events that work well within the parameters of our urban church setting (e.g. lack of storage and space in general to have regular thrift store operation). We plan to organize additional closet events in the future. We are grateful indeed for God’s provision for these unemployed men and women from generous-hearted Redeemerites such as you—the Body of Christ in action. Thank you for modeling Deuteronomy 10:19 “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” to us.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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# 25 YEARS OF MINISTRY IN NYC— THANKS BE TO GOD!

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BY CREGAN COOKE

This April marks the 25th anniversary of the first worship service at Redeemer. From its beginning, Redeemer was built on the idea that the gospel changes everything. On April 9, 1989, sixty people met for worship at the Church of the Advent Hope 111 E. 87th Street. On September 24, 1989, Redeemer held its first morning worship service. With those two dates in mind, Redeemer is kicking off its 25th anniversary season this month, which will conclude with a special weekend and worship services Sunday, September 21.

I remember the first Redeemer church service I attended in January 1991. My roommates and I had heard that there was a new church in Manhattan that was “different.” Right away we noticed several things that were unique about Redeemer. We heard the gospel preached in a way we hadn’t heard it presented before, there were hundreds of young professionals in attendance, and there was a quality to the worship that was attractive.

It was beautiful and relatable not only to someone who grew up in church but also to someone who was encountering the gospel and church for the first time. From our first visit, my two roommates and I began attending regularly and began inviting our friends, many who didn’t have a personal faith. By 1996 my roommates and I had all become members.

Throughout those early years right until today the gospel is what shapes Redeemer’s vision to transform the city. In 1994 Hope for New York was formed to bring gospel hope and renewal to the city’s poor and marginalized. In 1998, with over three thousand weekly attendees at three services at Hunter College, the church leadership moved away from the mega-church model and began worshipping at new sites to bring the hope of the gospel to more neighborhoods across the city. At the same time the Redeemer Church Planting Center (now Redeemer City to City) was founded and began to

plant churches in NYC and other global cities. In 2002 the Center for Faith & Work was started to renew our work and culture in light of the gospel. God has done and continues to do more than anyone asked or expected and we want to give him all the glory for the community and ministries he has brought into existence here in NYC and around the world over the last 25 years.

Looking back and looking ahead to the next 25 years, we thank God for everything he has done in and through Redeemer to renew New York City and other cities around the world. And we pray that through the gospel movement he has started, God will continue to be glorified and work through Redeemer’s ministries and congregations to bring renewal to more people, neighborhoods and cities in the years to come. After every worship service we say “Thanks be to God.” After 25 years we are humbled and inspired to say it again—Thanks be to God!

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## ACTING, IMPROV, AND PUBLIC FAITH... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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That means that although those who rest in Christ must still obey the Ten Commandments, those commandments are no longer a way to establish their own righteousness before God and the world. Jesus is also the end of using art, business, and career for ‘righteousness.’ We don’t go out trying to prove ourselves—Jesus has embraced us. Now we can simply use our gifts for the love of God and our neighbor. The work is about God, about other people, and about the work itself.

Blaine also pointed out that the improv in particular means dying to yourself—it means being willing to make the other actors look good rather than trying to hog the spotlight for yourself. You must take their leads and follow their cues. The more you seek to lift up and highlight the work of others, the more the whole troupe or team or ensemble looks great. Jesus’ principle that you must lose yourself to find yourself works its way out in many realms.

In the discussion, talk, and Q

and A afterward there was also occasion to point out how the gospel helps us distinguish between forms of humor. Some humor is destructive—it can be used to marginalize and reduce people to caricatures. It can be used to trivialize important truths. But it can also be a way of creating community, of showing deep affection, and of expressing humility and grace.

The gospel also gives us the joy of grace. Moralistic people think

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# SINGLE: GOD'S GIFTS, OUR PLANS

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BY JESSICA HONG

On Saturday, March 1, 2014, Redeemer held a sold-out SINGLES Conference. Over 900 attended, with an additional 900 watching on Livestream. There have also been over 30,000 views online in less than a week. The goal of the conference was to pastorally address the majority of our church and share personal stories and theological reflections on the topic of singleness.

The focus of the conference was to address one's internal belief in God, which, in turn, would ground single persons' external choices in life. Internally, the hope is to believe in the goodness and sufficiency of Christ in singleness; externally attendees were challenged to use singleness as a means to glorify God and to love others. And only through deep community do the internal belief and the external choices come together in vital personal nourishment, as well as service and ministry.

The talks given by the speakers revolved around this 2-fold focus. The event began with a video created by Jordan Tanksley who had interviewed men and women on their current status as singles. Most

hoped to be in a relationship and they shared the highs and lows of being single.

Brent Bounds, Director of Family Ministries, sponsored this event and he sent out a Survey Monkey to the registrants about singleness and dating. Most of the participants had never been married, and while some were dating seriously, others were separated and a few were divorced. Sixty-eight percent of the participants said they had engaged in sexual activities that they felt were inappropriate. Additional comments were made in the survey. One person wrote, "*Sometimes I doubt His goodness in my life when I begin to compare what I don't have with my peers who are married and already have children.*" And yet another wrote, "*I know God's character is constant, but I struggle to trust who God is when I feel He has failed me in this area.*"

Jordan Tanksley's talk, "What You Didn't Know About Being Single," surveyed how this SINGLES conference came into being. She interviewed over a 100 participants on their views of being single and the reality of their

worldview and the world's view on romantic relationships and singleness. Jessica Hong's talk, "Expectations vs. Reality" discussed the disparity between how she thought her life would turn out and the reality of what it was.

Wesley Hill, author of *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, spoke on Christian celibacy and friendship in the single life. Janice Worth, entrepreneur and President of Anushka Inc, gave a powerful testimony as a single mother. Kathy Keller gave a pastoral talk discussing the benefits and suffering that come with being a Christian single and reminding them that God's grace is sufficient for each day. Tim Keller reinforced Kathy's talk giving a theology of singleness based on 1 Corinthians 7. Lastly, Bethany Jenkins closed out the event with a history of the term "single" and how it became to be used today and ended on a personal testimony where she reminded herself and the audience "she was betrothed in faith, though single by sight." You can access the talks here: [www.redeemer.com/single](http://www.redeemer.com/single).

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## ACTING, IMPROV, AND PUBLIC FAITH... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

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it is perfectly appropriate that God blesses them—after all, they worked hard and they deserve it! There's nothing to laugh at there. But Christians know that their salvation is completely incongruous—totally undeserved, unlooked for, a wonderful, joyous surprise. Those who realize they are saved by sheer grace that they not only did not deserve but did not seek will laugh, "Yes, but what a joke! Me a Christian! It shouldn't be—but it is!"

Traditionally there have been two kinds of stories. There are tragedies and comedies. Tragedies begin in peace but end in sorrow. Comedies, however, move through sorrow and nail-biting danger but end with deliverance and joy. And that makes the gospel the greatest comedic force in history. It not only turns our life into a divine comedy, but it will eventually do the same thing for the history of the entire world.

This improv event was part of

Redeemer's 'Public Faith' year. It is crucial to show our city how the Christian gospel transforms every part of our lives—including our work and our art. It makes emotional, vocational, and cultural sense, as well as intellectual and rational sense. We especially thank Blaine and his colleagues for an afternoon of laughter. It seemed to me to be a bit of a foretaste of that day in which every tear will be wiped away (Revelation 21:4)—except tears of joy.

# HOPE FOR NEW YORK EASTER SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

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This Easter as we're celebrating Christ's victory over death, we also remember those in our city who are poor or marginalized and in need of hope and healing. The good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus compels us to address brokenness in whatever form we encounter it.

That's why, as we've done every Easter for the past 20+ years, we receive our Easter Sacrificial Offering for HFNY, our mercy and justice outreach to the city.

100% of the gifts received will be given to Hope for New York affiliate organizations that support various New York City populations including at-risk youth, low-income families, immigrants, the homeless, and the elderly.

You can give during the Easter Sunday service, or beforehand by giving online ([hfny.org/donate](http://hfny.org/donate)) or sending checks (payable to "Hope for New York") to Hope for New York, 1359 Broadway, Suite 410, New York, NY, 10018.

In addition, you can also consider making regular generosity to the poor a part of your life with The Hope Exchange, Hope for New York's committed monthly giving program. You can join at [hfny.org/hope-exchange](http://hfny.org/hope-exchange).

Please pray that our congregation would be moved to give generously on Easter Sunday, and please also prayerfully consider how you might support Hope for New York's efforts to serve the poor of our city.

## IN THE LIVING ROOM: SEVEN WEEKS EXPLORING MY FAITH AND ART

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For seven weeks in January and February I was part of a Center for Faith & Work Artist Intensive called *In the Living Room*. The curriculum of the *Living Room* consisted of seven different themes, all tied to the role of the artist in the church.

One week we learned about "The Artist as Creator." Among all the wisdom I received through the *Living Room*, one of the things I heard that night has rolled around in my mind most actively. The facilitator explained Andy Crouch's idea from *Culture Making* that Christians tend to approach culture in three ways.

First, they may shun it entirely. Second, they might attempt to co-opt it, absorbing trends into the "Christian" subculture (for example, the website GodTube). Third, believers tend to embrace secular trends and artifacts that uphold biblical values, e.g., the 2012 movie musical *Les Misérables* and its Christlike hero Jean Valjean.

But Crouch offers another response. Rather than shun the culture, rather than absorb it or con-

sume it, our most feasible outlet for changing culture is to create a new culture. The artists of the *Living Room* were forcefully charged with this task. It is artists who so often define the values of a particular group in a particular place at a particular time.

Jesus himself started a culture, albeit a small one at first. He defined a new way to pray, a new way to fight evil and injustice, a new way to approach work, a new way to approach disease, a new way to approach sin. This culture did not leave earth when He did. What a joy: the church carries on in the legacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus promised new and abundant life to us, and that life is for the group as well as the individual. We can, like Him, live outside the idioms of our humanistic Western culture without condemning them.

The *Living Room* represents a step in that direction. As we learned and shared together, we formed a community. We shared our art with each other—no small feat. Visual artists brought in work or displayed pictures via PowerPoint;

BY MERRILL LEE GIRARDEAU

actors offered monologues; writers read; one woman danced an unaccompanied flamenco solo! It was a peaceable exchange of gifts, a way for all of us to participate with and encourage each other in the surprising, often painful process of creation. That's where culture starts: finding and developing common bonds with others.

The less certain part comes next: our creative lives outside the *Living Room*. I hope all of us can sustain the spirit of creative innovation and excellence those seven weeks inspired. I hope we can find ways to maintain this culture of artists within the larger culture of the Church. We have an email chain going, and certain participants have continued to meet every Tuesday night. That's a start. But I also hope we take time to consider how the Lord can advise our art. As members of His society of "peculiar people" (1 Pt 2:9), we can avoid trafficking in existing, secular trends. We can start something new, because He can start something new. He has given us the

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## PUBLIC FAITH AND HOSPITALITY... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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*Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999), tells us “*Strangers are people without a place, disconnected from life-giving relationships and networks.*” The followers of Jesus identify both those who are poor and those whose beliefs differ from the Christian faith as persons with whom we ought to be intentional regarding the practice of hospitality.

Essentially, hospitality is opening up not only our homes but, more importantly, our very selves to others so that they feel welcomed, loved, cared for, nurtured and valued. Hospitality can also occur in places like a coffee shop or a park. During this year of Public Faith at Redeemer we especially want to encourage people to engage intentionally in hospitality with friends who don't share our faith commitments. Done well (see below for some things

to keep in mind when engaging in the practice), hospitality is part of gospel living in which we can verbally proclaim the good news even as we embody it.

*Important things to keep in mind in practicing hospitality:*

1. Embrace of others is more important than the place where hospitality occurs.
2. Your space need not be perfect to invite others over. Beauty is found more in the welcome itself than in the space.
3. Lines between guest and host are frequently wonderfully blurred as we invite others to participate in life with us. If we are to truly honor others, we have to give to others and also let them give to us.

4. It is essential that we bring our authentic and flawed selves into our hospitable relationships. Pretending to be something we are not does not give life to others.

5. Engaging in meaningful conversation and cultivating active listening skills in which we take a genuine interest in others are essential.
6. Gathering people who are sometimes very different from one another into meaningful connection with one another is a great gift we can offer.
7. Hospitality is often best practiced as a community. We ought to enlist others to help us rather than trying to do it all on our own.

## IN THE LIVINGROOM... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

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Word of God, the example of Jesus, the immanence of the Holy Spirit, and of course, each other.

Registration for the West Side iteration of *In The Living Room* is now open to artists of all

disciplines. Please visit [www.faithandwork.org/livingroom](http://www.faithandwork.org/livingroom) for more details.