

## **Welcome (2): Hospitality**

### Scripture

Gen 18.1-15; Lev 25.35-38; Deu 15.7-11; Jos 2.1-21; Pss 68.5; 113.9; Isa 58.6-12; Mt 10.40-42; Lk 24.28-35; Act 4.32-35; Rom 12.9-13; 2 Cor 8.13f; Gal 6.10; Heb 13.1f, 16; 1 Jn 3.17.

### Graih

1): Mark was a man who struggled with addictions. He had beaten his addiction to heroin but it had been replaced with alcoholism. A close relationship had broken down, he'd found himself in an awful boarding house and he'd ended up in prison for petty crime.

Upon release from prison, having lost his accommodation, Mark stayed in a squat while looking for somewhere to live. It was here that he was sexually assaulted by a drinking partner. Mark turned up at the drop-in tearful and in a state. The police got involved. Our priority was to find Mark somewhere safe to stay. He needed people around him and somewhere to sleep.

At a loss about what to do Graih approached the church. There was a generous response but no-one could accommodate Mark. Instead, there was enough money to put Mark into a bed-and-breakfast for a few days. At a time of immense pain and fragility, when all Mark needed was people around him, the very depths of his need meant that this wasn't possible.

In the absence of witnesses the police case was dropped. The inebriation of those involved didn't help. As is often the case those most in need of help were unable to get it because of their vulnerability.

2): Graih has been involved, to a greater or lesser degree, with multiple houses of hospitality over the years. These exceptional families and individuals have been always been Christians and they have opened their homes to people most in need.

The demands of individuals in a state of crisis are immense. Along with all the usual difficulties of sharing living space there are problems of pain, addiction, loneliness, mental ill health and need. Neither is it easy for the guest, heading into a private home unsure of what they will find or how they will be treated. They may be unsure what the expectations of behaviour are.

To increase their capacity to offer welcome some of these houses have invited other Christians to live with them. The benefit in support and safety are exponential when there's more stable people around. The presence of extra people has sometimes been the determining factor in whether a house can offer hospitality or not.

Such hospitality does not always work. People leave, returning to the problems they grapple with. Others find it transformational. Harry spoke of time spent in a family home as 'the time when I broke the back of my problems'. Chad found peace and stability with a family before heading off-island to rehab and re-settling into a better life. Trevor found the stability of a shared home helpful as he returned to work and rebuilt relationships with his family. Hospitality is also two-way, with the hosts being blessed and challenged by the guests. Hosts have found their faith deepen in unexpected ways as God uses guests to teach and encourage them. Such mutuality is important.

Hospitality is on a scale. Many of the guys that Graih sees have little or no family and no way to cook a meal. Food shared around a dining table can mean everything to such people. A kitchen to sit in and have a cup of tea becomes a haven of hope and peace. And those with no kin of their own glimpse what it might mean to belong to a much bigger family.

### Questions

1. What are your experiences of hospitality, as guest or host? What was good or difficult?
2. Was Graih's and the church's response to Mark how it should be? If not, what could be done differently?

3. In what ways does the knowledge that God often comes in the guise of the stranger needing hospitality inform your welcome of others?
4. Should we welcome Christians differently? If so, why and in what way?
5. What might we need to share to ensure that there are 'no needy among us'? What will this cost us? Are you willing to meet that cost?
6. God seems to delight in welcoming the outcast and vulnerable. Do you? Do we as a church? If not, what do we need to do differently? Does the insight that God also seems to favour moving through the marginalised and revealing himself in and through them help?

#### Ideas for further action

1. Be disciplined about practising hospitality to the vulnerable. This could be anything from a cup of tea to a meal or a stay at your home.
2. Explore fostering and adoption as examples of hospitality to those in need (see [www.thechildrenscentre.org.uk/what-we-do/fostering-first-adoption](http://www.thechildrenscentre.org.uk/what-we-do/fostering-first-adoption)).
3. Ask an individual or household practising radical hospitality how you can support them.
4. Ask guests or hosts of hospitality to come and share their experience with you.
5. Get involved in a local group serving the needy and build hospitable relationships with those on the margins.

#### Prayer

Father, thank you for the extravagance of your love that casts out all fear. Thank you for the boundless, faithful, unhesitating welcome that you offer us. May we have your heart of welcome.

Jesus, thank you that we meet with you when we extend hospitality to the needy, and that we are blessed by you as we are served. Help us to have the eyes to see you and the grace to welcome you.

Spirit, blow your creative breath over our hearts and homes. Inspire us to hold things lightly, to share what we have and to thirst to see the day when there are no needy among us.

Amen.