

Hospitality to the world *Ruth 2:1-16; Matt 25:31-40*

Introduction

I want to start this sermon with some words written by a good friend of mine Geoff Broughton in a recent copy of *St Mark's Review*.

Geoff is sharing some reflections about his work.

He says, 'For many Christians, inner Sydney's red light district ... would be an unlikely place to locate God. The sin, pain and brokenness evident in the lives of so many might lead to the conclusion that it is ... "God-forsaken" ...'

Within this setting, however, there is a particular place that bears witness to God's forgiveness, healing and transformation...*Rough Edges* Community Centre.

'Approaching RE's the first images are probably of the glass door—usually open—alongside people gathered together around small tables, drinking coffee, eating together, playing chess or simply chatting. Those gathered are not fashionable enough to make this just another trendy café in the heart of the city. But neither is the atmosphere dark or depressing enough ... to be just another drop-in centre.'

'On the wall ... hangs a plaque that gives a clue to its proper identity. [It reads]:

Rough Edges is a place where....

- *everyone is important*
- *everyone is welcome*
- *you can discover friendships*
- *you can have a quiet chat*
- *you can receive assistance that's not a hand-out*
- *you can give assistance*
- *you can ask questions about faith in Jesus*
- *you can escape the violence of the streets*
- *you wont be pressured to conform to other people's standards or beliefs*
- *we wont engage in abusive relationships*
- *the issues of justice, equity and love are taken seriously and put into practice'*

'These words confirm the impression gained as you approach...the open door, as you are greeted by a volunteer serving behind the counter, or by sitting down as someone listens to your story:
Rough Edges is a place of hospitality.'

That story sums up what I want to talk about today – our call to offer hospitality to the world.

The people who visit *Rough Edges* have come from *hostile* places: raw streets, sterile waiting rooms, lonely boarding houses. It's nothing flash, but for them, *Rough Edges* is an oasis, a refuge,

a sanctuary of welcome and rest.

Perhaps here, more than anywhere else in their world, they catch a glimpse, a sniff of the presence and love of God.

As Christians, this is what we're called to do—
to create free and friendly places for the weary of the world.

Our inspiration, our guide in this holy calling, is Jesus,
the very one who welcomed us.

He was a master at hospitality.

Think of how they flocked ...the sick...the poor...the desperate...the disrespectful...
they loved him, they loved *being* with him.

The Ph's, the *so-called* religious ones had turned up their noses,
they were far too pure, far too good to associate with such riff raff.

Jesus was different. He loved them, he joined in...touched their lives.

His message, in all this was simple—***with God there are no outsiders.***

Of course, it all started way back in Genesis, where God, out of chaos, forms a garden, a hospitable place for Adam and Eve.

Later he leads them out of hostile Egypt,
to a promised land,
where they are made to feel *at home*.

They in turn, are called to be hospitable.

'*Don't oppress an alien,*' they're told (*Exodus 23:9*) '*for you know how it feels,
you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.*'

(*Deut 10:18-19*) '*God* *defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, providing them with food and clothing. And you, [you] are to love the alien [too], for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.*'

The book of Ruth is a story about love for the alien.

In ch 2, Naomi sends Ruth out into the fields to glean.

This was perfectly legal.

Indeed, the law commanded it. (*Lev 19:9f*)

When harvesting the field the reapers were to leave the edges uncut.

It was there for whoever needed it - for the poor, the alien, the sojourner.

The pattern of God's people was to reflect God's hospitable nature.

In the early church, this hospitality to outsiders was a sign of the presence and power of the Spirit.

When Jewish converts were confronted with Gentile converts, they were commanded to be hospitable.

They weren't to say, 'You're welcome, so long as you adopt *our* laws, our customs.'

No, they were to accept them as they came – ‘unclean’ and uncircumcised.
Yo see it wasn’t a case of Gentiles becoming Jews,
In God’s hospitality both host and guest become something new,
Jew and gentile become Christian.

One of the most famous parables is the story J told of the wedding feast. (Lk 14:15-23)

In the parable all the respectable people are invited to the wedding.
One by one they make excuses.
Forget them! said the master,
Get out into the streets of the city, and into the country roads and bring in anyone you
can find.
That’s the way it is with God – everyone’s welcome.
In Jesus, God opens his arms to the world,
and in the church, the story continues.

Refugees

Today as we think about this theme we’re remembering esp. refugees.

Do you know, this very day, there’s somewhere btw 25-45 mil people wandering this
planet looking for a safe place to settle.
That’s more than the entire population of Australia!
Call them refugees, call them what you like,
they are vulnerable people in need of mercy.
Most of them have nothing, nothing but shattered memories and a flickering hope that
someone, somewhere will say: *‘Welcome, come and join us, make yourself at home.’*

They are victims of *hostility* searching for *hospitality*,

So what happens when they come here??? To the lucky country of Australia.

*‘Beneath our radiant Southern Cross we’ll toil with hearts and hands;
To make this Commonwealth of ours renowned of all the lands;
For those who’ve come across the seas we’ve boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine to Advance Australia Fair’*

We don’t tend to sing that verse. Given our record in recent years, it’s probably a good
thing.

Foreign policy...immigration...children in detention...the Pacific solution... What’s
your view?

Are we a hospitable country? Or have we somehow grown cold and hard and defensive?

I’d be easy to get into a government bash.

I don’t want to do that. In the end, we get the government we vote for.

We need to think about that when it comes to our vote in a couple of weeks.
In the meantime, let’s also think about us.

How do we feel about this issue? How far are we prepared to go when it comes to welcoming others to our country?

Sure we want to help, especially the nice ones.

But, wow, so many!

Where will they all fit?

Who's going to feed them? House them? Bear with their trauma and pain?

Who's going to pay?

What if my taxes go up?

What if it starts to impinge on *my* security, *my* job, *my* place in the hospital queue?

If we're honest, most of us are somewhat uneasy about being *too* hospitable.

In some ways it's just easier to criticise the government.

Well, there's a place for that, governments must be held accountable.

But what if we move beyond criticism?

What else could we do?

Maybe the first thing is just to listen. To befriend those already in our midst.

Tell me, how many of our Sudanese b's and s's have you met?

Do you remember their names? Have you heard their stories?

// Transport to church is a constant need. If you were to pick up a family each week it'd be a great way to get to know them.

As a church, we've tried to take some practical steps.

Part of Pam's role now is as support person for our new Sudanese families.

If you can't catch her at the office, it's probably because she's at the hospital, or Centrelink, or housing, or one of the schools, or the shops ...

She does an unbelievable job.

We cover her for a day a week, she gives about four!!!

Maybe there are ways you could help?

We're currently in the process of setting up a Refugee Resettlement Loan Scheme, maybe you'd like to make a founding donation?

Whatever it is, let's do more than one offs, let make our hospitality *a way of life*.

Each act, a sign of our ongoing commitment.

Daily, in our living, let's be those who create friend and friendly space for the lost, the lonely, the displaced and vulnerable of our world.

I was wanted to say something about other religions,
that'll have to wait for another day.

For now, let me go back to those words on the plaque on that wall in *Rough Edges*.
And let's make them ours.

Let's live in such a way that St George's becomes a place...

- *everyone is important*
- *everyone is welcome*
- *you can discover friendships*
- *you can have a quiet chat*
- *you can receive assistance that's not a hand-out*
- *you can give assistance*
- *you can ask questions about faith in Jesus*
- *you can escape the violence of the streets*
- *you won't be pressured to conform to other people's standards or beliefs*
- *we won't engage in abusive relationships*
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We *can* be that place, but only if it's *all* of us,
each of us playing our part.

If we leave it to someone else, then it probably won't happen.

So let me ask you: Are you willing?

Are we willing to pay the price? To step out of your comfort zone?

To do the thing God is calling *you* to do

so that *we* might be the place God has call us to be,
a place of hospitable to the world?

Let's pray.

Remember that we ourselves are really just resident aliens on this planet.

This world is not our home.

If we grow too comfortable our hearts grow cold.

We spend all our time amassing and protecting and indulging,
we easily forget about others...