

Jesus and Airbnb

Sunday January 19, 2020

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

John 1:29-42

Planning a trip is hard work. First you must pick a destination. Then you need to choose how you're going to get there. Then you need to book a place to stay; and that can be spendy! The national average for a hotel room in 2017 was \$180.12 per night! If you spend less than that, you're probably staying at a low-budget chain motel. Fortunately, today's traveler has options: online platforms that connect us with people willing to share a room or an entire house at a price far below a commercial facility.

The leading disrupter of the hospitality industry is Airbnb. Its founders visualized sharing apartments and homes after putting an air mattress in their living room to offset the high cost of rent in San Francisco. They effectively turned their apartment into a bed and breakfast. Today, a little more than 10 years after its humble beginnings, Airbnb is valued at more than \$30 billion with tens of millions of overnight bookings around the world.

I started thinking about Airbnb because in our text today, two disciples ask Jesus, "Where are you staying?" and he answers, "Come and see." Jesus invites his new friends to check out where he's staying! So, I wondered: what does Jesus' guest house look like? It's not his own house. Indications are that Jesus was like many millennials today, living with his parents until he was 30. Perhaps Jesus rented an Airbnb in Capernaum and it is to this house that he invites his new friends. Or, maybe Mary and Joseph had a rental cabin by the Sea of Galilee. Probably not, but this is an unusual situation in which Jesus is the host.

At other times, Jesus is the guest, or he invites himself to someone's house (think of Zacchaeus, Luke 19). In Revelation, Jesus is knocking on the door, trying to wrangle a dinner invitation (3:20). Here, as the host, Jesus extends the invitation to "come and see."

I wondered how we might behave if Jesus were a guest in our house. If Jesus were our guest what would we serve? There certainly wouldn't be any problem with the wine: we'd just put a pitcher of water on the table and let Jesus take care of the rest. We'd probably serve some bread and maybe a couple of Walleye: Jesus can make a whole meal out of a few rolls and two fish. Maybe we'd serve some figs or falafel or hummus with crackers? Oh, and olives! You've got to have olives. And olive oil – just avoid the "virgin" or "extra virgin" olive oil – it might make the conversation a little awkward.

If Jesus were our guest, how would we decorate? What about furniture? Would we eat around a table or on the floor? Be sure to find Grandma's Bible, and dust it off and have it lying casually on a table (maybe open to John 3:16?). Should we put up a cross? Maybe. Could be touchy or in bad taste. And what's the proper etiquette when hosting the Son of God? Do we have to wash our feet as well as our hands before dinner?

How would we entertain Jesus? Maybe he likes video games. We could pull out that game about the Pharisees and Sadducees, called *Broods of Vipers*. Or maybe any video game where the characters are revived (resurrected?). Jesus would like that one. How about conversation: what would we talk about? "Hey, did you catch that chariot race?" Do we talk about the weather? That's not much fun since Jesus can control the weather. Do we make small talk? "So, you were born in Bethlehem? Raised in Nazareth? Pretty good carpenter, eh?"

Would you play cards? It's probably not a good idea, given how Jesus knows everything! Would we have to say grace before the meal? Talk about pressure! How embarrassing to freeze up with Jesus sitting across the table! We wouldn't want to sound like Sister Mary Clarence in *Sister Act*. "Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts...and, yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of no food, I shall fear no hunger. We want you to give us this day our daily bread...and to the republic for which it stands...by the power vested in me, I now pronounce us, ready to eat. Amen."

What, on the other hand, would we do if Jesus invited us to his home? In the gospels, Jesus is the host three times. The first instance is the text before us today. Jesus tells two of his future disciples to "come and see" where he's staying. The second time Jesus hosts is when he gathers his disciples for the Last Supper. On this occasion, the disciples ask Jesus what they were going to do about Passover. Jesus tells Peter and John, "*Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it*" (Luke 22:8). Finally, there is a post-resurrection scene in Galilee where "*Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'*" *None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?'*" *They knew it was the Lord.*" (John 21:12).

At the first hosting experience (Capernaum), Jesus says, "Come and see." At the second hosting experience (Last Supper), Jesus says, "Go and prepare." At the third hosting experience (Galilee), Jesus says, "Come and dine." Jesus is ready and willing to be our host. Will we accept his invitation to "come and see," to "go and prepare," and to "come and dine"? It is a fabulous invitation which offers an empowering and enriching experience.

Come and see. When Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, “Come and see,” he sets the mode for our ministry as Christians, and the message for the work of the church. Ours is an inviting and welcoming ministry. The church is called to invite and welcome everyone in Jesus’ name. We don’t coerce; we commend. We don’t impose; we invite. We don’t wrestle and wrangle; we welcome. We don’t attack; we attract. We don’t lampoon; we love.

The mission of the church and our responsibility as disciples of Jesus is not to belittle people if they don’t believe exactly what we believe; not to tell people to go to the church down the street where they might be more comfortable; not to assess their eternal destiny; not to denigrate them according to race, gender, political allegiances, their taste in tattoos or music or the team they will root for in the Super Bowl. Jesus encourages us to follow his example as a host: to be inviting and welcoming. Three words. “Come and see.” This is all we need to say to those who are seeking a deeper, more meaningful life.

Go and prepare. As the Passover drew near, the disciples want to know what Jesus has planned. Jesus indicates that he will be the host of the Passover meal, but he asks the disciples to help him with transportation and the venue. He tells them to “Go and prepare.” This is precisely what the disciples do: They find Jesus a donkey and an upper room. In Luke, Jesus’ specific instructions are, “*Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it*” (22:8). In other words, not only are we to welcome others to the meal, we may be asked to prepare the meal, too!

When Jesus asks us to “Go and prepare,” it is an invitation to consider what our guests will need and appreciate. What can we do to make them feel welcome? What can we do to help them deepen their faith or their discipleship? One interesting note: when Jesus asks us to “Go and prepare,” he is not asking us to do anything he would not do himself. Jesus promises that he will go and prepare “a place for you” (John 14:3). It’s not exactly *quid pro quo*, but the implication is clear: “You go and prepare here and now, and I will go and prepare a place for you in God’s Kingdom.”

Come and dine. Finally, Jesus acts as host in Galilee when he invites his disciples to a fish breakfast. This call to “come and dine” is the logical, third step in the discipleship process. First, we invite; then we prepare the meal; and now, we call people to dine, to sit down and partake of the faith and the fellowship that will feed their souls.

Many business deals are sealed over dinners. Meals are often the occasion when planning, preparation, future-thinking, decisions and proposals are made. It is no

different here. Jesus is handing out jobs. The most challenging interview is with Peter. As they’re munching on tilapia, Jesus asks Peter about his future employment plans. You know how this goes. After a brief period of confusion, Peter gets his commission. Jesus asks Peter to “feed my sheep,” and Peter agrees, even though it will cost him his life.

Jesus invites us to have a meal with him. Not just the meal we know as the Communion. Jesus invites us to enter an intimate relationship with him, uniting with our Creator-God so that we know God’s will for us and be strengthened by God’s Spirit to accomplish it.

Jesus is more than an Airbnb host, of course; but no doubt when we invite people to come and see, to go and prepare, and to come and dine, they are going to check the reviews. Are we people who live out our faith? Do our actions match our words? What are other people saying? Does Federated Church get five stars? Three stars? No stars? As the host, Jesus shows us by his example how to be welcoming, how to prepare the fulfilling meal, and then, how to invite others to “come and dine.”

One of our 20-in-20 goals this year is to be an inviting church, and specifically for each member to extend 20 invitations to others to “come and see” what we are doing here in the name of Jesus. That’s 20 opportunities for each of us to “go and prepare” to welcome someone to worship or fellowship with us. That’s 20 possibilities to “come and dine” with someone and share the good news of Jesus, our host. I want to be that inviting and welcoming church! Don’t you?

Prayer: O Lord, forgive us when we fail to respond to your call with faith. Forgive us when we are shackled by our narrow understandings of discipleship and our clouded sense of purpose. Forgive us when we are frightened of the future or pull back from the demand of your calling. Forgive us when we fail to sense your presence in our past, to acknowledge your grace in the present moment, and to trust you for our future. Through your Spirit we stand in the assurance of your acceptance. Through your Spirit we are drawn into the illumination of your empowering love. Through your Spirit we offer ourselves in discipleship. We stand together as your disciples. We seek renewed and renewing faith. Touch us now with your Spirit, Lord. Amen.

Source: Dawit Habtermariam, “Demand Drives U.S. Hotels.” March 27, 2018. (Visited January 15, 2020). <https://www.businesstravelnews.com/Corporate-Travel-Index/2018/Demand-Drives-US-Hotels>