

November 10, 2019

Title: "Come from Away"

[Slide 1]

Text: Romans 12:13

Hospitality

September 11, 2001:

[Slide 2]

The town of Gander, Newfoundland has six traffic and a population of less than 13,000, approximately the same as St. Albans City and Town combined. But on September 11, 2001 it found itself host to 6759 passengers and crew from 38 airliners that had been diverted to Gander Airport – a former World War II military base -- in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States.

For the next four days the citizens of Gander provided hospitality in a thousand forms for the stranded travelers, as well as 9 cats, 11 dogs and a pair of endangered bonobos! They brought 2000 prescriptions to the planes, worked around the clock to prepare to welcome their unexpected guests, then drove them to makeshift shelters in local schools. The people of Gander opened their homes to people to take showers; they provided barbecues for huge cookouts. They even threw a giant party for several terminally ill children who had been on their way from London to Disney World!

Newfoundlanders have a phrase they use to describe people from other parts of the world: "Come from away." "Come from away" is also a metaphor for open arms. (<https://www.news.com.au/travel/travel-updates/incidents/uplifting-story-of-how-a-tiny-canadian-town-was-caught-up-in-911-tragedy/news-story/a5a7dff7d39701ce07083fc73db8e62a>)

Hospitality:

Paul would have certainly given the good people of Gander, Newfoundland a thumbs up. In writing to Christians in Rome, he says:

[Slide 3]

Romans 12:13 NIV

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

The Christians in Rome had recently been through their own upheavals.

The Roman historian Suetonius writes:

[Slide 4]

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome.

It is assumed by most scholars that "Chrestus" – a common name at the time – is actually a misspelling of "Christos" – Christ. Given the tension between the early Christians and the Jewish community, it is not hard to see how such disturbances could have found their way to Rome and thus gained the attention of the Emperor.

This expulsion took place in A.D. 49, just a year or so before Paul met two of the exiles in the Greek city of Corinth:

[Slide 5]

Acts 18:1-3 NIV

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

But now, as Paul writes the Letter to the Romans, the Jewish population had been permitted to return to Rome. Churches that had been entirely Gentile for several years now found Jewish Christians coming back home – no doubt impoverished by their recent banishment. It was time for some serious hospitality!

The True Test of Discipleship

Faith in Action:

Paul was not the only first-century Christian to focus on the importance of hospitality. James, the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem writes:

[Slide 6]

James 2:14-17 NIV

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Strong words! For James, sharing with those in need practicing hospitality were a demonstration of true faith in action. As James puts it: "I will show you my faith by my deeds." (James 2:18 NIV)

Love in action:

The writer John makes sharing with those in need a test of whether or not God's love is in us:

[Slide 7]

1 John 3:16-19 NIV

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

The people of Gander didn't go out to the airport on September 11th with posters saying "We love you!" They went to their "Come from away" guests with an offer of food and shelter. They took total strangers into their homes and fed them at their table. They walked their dogs, fed their cats, delivered their prescriptions, cried with them over lost loved ones. They treated them

like family. They loved not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

The test of a disciple:

But the strongest words on the subject come from Jesus Himself. He tells a parable about the end of time when we all stand before Him:

[Slide 8]

Matthew 25:34-36 NIV

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'"

Simple acts of kindness: food and drink for a hungry and thirsty person, a home for a stranger, clothing, nursing someone back to health, caring for a person in prison. These are what Paul was talking about. These are the practical, down-to-earth ways that faith and love get worked out in the real world.

And these actions matter more than we could ever know!

[Slide 9]

Matthew 25:37-40 NIV

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Jesus is present when we act out His love in the real world. How we treat others is how we treat Him. Sharing with those in need is the test of the true disciple.

“Come from Away”

True faith, love and discipleship:

God gives you and me the opportunity to demonstrate true faith, true love and true discipleship. It may be a meal cooked for a family with a sick loved one. It may be helping provide food for Martha’s Community Kitchen. It may be putting a bag of new socks in the box by the church door for a homeless person.

One very real way that you can touch the life of a needy child is to take an Operation Christmas Child box home with you today and fill it up with presents. Think of it: that box will end up in the hands of a boy or girl thousands of miles away. It will be a tangible act of love that carries an even more important message inside – the story of Jesus and how we can receive eternal life!

Unnamed wise men brought gifts to Jesus to honor Him as King. We celebrate that act of giving to this very day. But Jesus says that a gift to “one of the least of these” is a gift given to Him!

So, I challenge you to put Paul’s commands into action:

[Slide 10]

Romans 12:13 NIV

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