

Good morning. Just wanted to redecorate here this morning. It is such an honor to be with you all. And we're continuing this series of "When Love Gets Difficult" and looking at the deeper and costlier dimensions of love through the lens of Romans 12. Last week, the other Rob taught on *Loving God when Life Is Hard*.

He talks about growing in zeal to live out the way of Jesus with a readiness and eagerness to love well, to use our authority to actually serve others, to live justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God. And so I want to continue that track today with Romans 12. I'm going to read this text in its entirety, so please bear with me. I think it's really important to have the whole text today. So here we go.

Practice hospitality. That's it. Good night, everybody. Two words. Two words.

The meaning of hospitality we heard in Greek earlier. In Latin, it's hospice, which also means guests or strangers. And so in early Christian writers, they claim that transcending ethnic and social differences by sharing meals, harmonious homes, and worship with people with different backgrounds was actually a proof of the Christian faith. Hospitality meant a recognition of a person's worth of common humanity. Henri Nouwen wrote extensively on hospitality, and he said that one of the gifts that we bring to the world as Christians is making our lives available to others.

And so practicing hospitality means to demonstrate love for the stranger, for the outsider, for the foreigner. Also, it means demonstrating love for those that we don't agree with, those who cut us off in traffic, those who think and look and act differently. In other words, when life gets difficult, we are called to practice hospitality. Some questions to frame our time. What does it mean to have God's heart for the people who don't feel like they belong at the table?

What's it mean to have God's heart for the people that we really didn't wish to have at the table?

What's it look like to be moving towards those who are different? This question who is on God's guest list?

Who is welcomed at his table? In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, sitting at a meal, or leaving a meal. Most of his discipleship happens around a table or at a breakfast, on a beach or on the side of a mountain instead of a classroom. And for Jesus, the table was not just a metaphor, it was the context for the kingdom. So I want to look quickly at Luke 5.

In the first part of Luke 5, Jesus calls his disciples, so this is the beginning of the Gospel. And then he proceeds to Heal a man of leprosy, and then he forgives another man and heals him of paralysis. And so verse 27. After that, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. Follow me, Jesus said.

And Levi got up. He left everything and followed him. And then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who belonged to their sect, complained to his disciples. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus answered them, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, it's the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Later in Luke, we see Jesus inviting himself to another tax collector's house, a wee little man named Zacchaeus. Tax collectors were hated, hated. They were collaborators with the enemy Rome.

They were perpetually, ceremonially unclean, which meant that there was no chance for them to have any essence of community, any semblance of companionship and friendship, except with other tax collectors, with the unclean, with the outsiders, with sinners. Jesus breaks into Levi's world and he says, come, follow me. And he did. And then he threw a party to celebrate. And the Pharisees had a deep problem with the guest list.

Tax collectors were traitors to their nation, but they were also traitors to God. Jesus was eating with God's enemies. So they asked him, why do you eat and drink with sinners? And essentially Jesus replies, well, who else would I eat with?

Jesus gives his mission statement. He's like a doctor who can't do his work unless he associates with the sick. He said, I came to call sinners to repentance, to give life to the lifeless, to give hope to the hopeless. Three times in the Gospel,

Jesus starts a sentence this way. The Son of Man came.

The first time is in Mark, chapter 10. The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Luke 19. The son of man came to seek and to save the lost. And in Luke 7, the son of man came eating and drinking.

And it's been said that the first two. The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many, and to seek and save the lost. Those describe Jesus purpose, but the last describes his method. Jesus came eating and drinking. That was his approach to ministry.

He came to break the barrier between insiders and outsiders, to bring new covenant, forgiveness, and restoration, in his words, to fulfill the Old Testament law and usher in God's new kingdom, giving a place at the table for any who would want it.

And this did not go over well with those who drew distinct lines between who's in and who's out. So dinner at Levi's house was a collision.

Jesus comes crashing into the Pharisee world of self reliance and pride in superiority, in hypocrisy, in self justification and self salvation, with the utterly subversive message of God's grace. He exposes two very different tables and two very different guest lists. On the one was the table that was gracious, was inclusive, was welcoming and feasting and rejoicing for people who readily recognized their need and repented. The other table was for the religious and the exclusive and the unwelcoming, those who fasted in order to manipulate the grumbling, the self righteous. Jesus said, pick a table.

Jesus was indiscriminate in who he ate with, the Pharisees and the prostitutes, the religious and the repulsive. And so when Jesus eats with Levi and his friends, he's sending a clear message about the new way of the kingdom. Jesus said, I came for the outcast. I came for the outsiders, the messy, the broken, the ordinary, the questioning, the doubting, the burned out, the losers, the foreigners, the exiles. That he has come for you and he's come for me in any of the other 8 billion people on the planet who will say yes to his invitation.

Eats with sinners was a label that was put on Jesus, but it describes your place. In my place at the table we sing the old hymn, Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound that saved the wretch like the guy down the street.

No, it saved a wretch like me. I'm the guy I once was lost. Now I'm found. The prize of grace comes in two waves. The first wave is, you mean Jesus eats with those people?

The second wave is, oh, I am those people.

We are the sinner, we are the stranger, we are the outsider. We are both the prodigal and the older brother.

Grace is scandalous. And so the good news is that Jesus has not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And he offers salvation. And we are welcome to God's feast, a feast that is for outsiders and the last picked and the poor and the powerless and the lost and lonely. We have a place at the table and God has opened up the guest list.

Psalms 68 says that God sets the lonely in families. Humanity cannot live isolated. We need Touch. We need attention. We need conversation.

We need someone to listen. We need warmth. We need reflection. We need to be needed. Tim Chester wrote, our invitation to the feast of God comes at a price.

The precious blood of Jesus, son. We are outsiders, enemies, excluded, but Jesus takes the judgment we deserve. He becomes the ultimate outsider. As a result, we become insiders, we become friends, we become included. The invitation goes out to all.

It's the gospel that creates community. So we've been welcomed in.

You belong here. Say I belong here. Oh, that was enthusiastic. Say I belong here. Yeah, welcome.

And so do the people who are difficult for us.

You see, God's enactment of mission is the process in reverse, moving outward, back through these doors, out onto the proverbial and literal streets, where we reach and we serve and we pray and we love and we invite people to the table. Its table epitomizes God's invitational heart.

It enacts his mission, creating spaces of belonging where people experience Jesus and experience tangible ramifications of his kingdom. So we want to create spaces in our homes and in our building and in our youth groups and in our small groups that are hospitable and welcoming. But we also want to go out these doors into the university and the workplace and into the neighborhoods and coffee shops to come alongside our friends and neighbors. Luke 13 says, People will come from the east and the west and the north and the south, and will take their places at the table in the kingdom of God.

God's heart is for the outsider to be the insider, for the stranger to be the known. You see it all the way through Scripture. Exodus 20:3. You shall not oppress the sojourner, the foreigner. Leviticus 19.

Treat the stranger who sojourns with you as your own. Love them as yourself. Isaiah 58. Share your bread with the hungry and the homeless poor. Deuteronomy 14.

Bring in the tithes of produce for the priests and the aliens and the fatherless and the widows. Hebrews 13. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers, because some of them are angels, incognito, which is kind of cool. Show hospitality first. Peter says to one another without grumbling.

Romans 12, contribute to the needs of the saints.

Titus, be hospitable. A lover of good table epitomizes God's invitational heart. And it is also the possibility of deep trust. It's a possibility for the sharing of a story. It's a possibility for reconciliation, for a place to know and be known.

I love reading Henri Nouwen, and he wrote this just bit about hospitality and he said it means primarily the creation of free space where. Where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.

It's not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom, not disturbed by dividing lines. It's in our world full of strangers estranged from their own past in culture, in country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God. We witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. Peter says, dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, they are us live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they end up worshiping God. Live such good lives among with.

So let me ask you, who is not at your table as you ponder that? I'm going to ask my friends to come up. This is Rachel and Matt. They are part of Campus House and Rachel's one of our managers at Gray House and Matt is the manager at Indie Coffee Roasters. We won't talk about that, but now we bless you, Matt.

I wanted them to spend part of our time this morning because they are actually in the hospitality profession. But beyond the coffee shops, they practice hospitality with their lives. And so as experts, Matt, how would you think about hospitality?

Yeah, good morning church. I think the last couple years Rachel and I have both given ourselves the hospitality. I interacted with a friend of mine recently who is somebody who, I don't know if you have a friend like this who asks you a question and then you leave and you're depressed. But like, just like I don't know if he's like a really good friend. I

don't know if he intends to do that.

But it's a deep question. And he said you talk about hospitality and his question was, was Jesus hospitable and is this like a command or was he just in Middle Eastern culture and was that just the value of the day? And one thing I wish I could have thought of in that moment was thinking about Peter's reactions to Jesus. Wearing servants clothes and washing his feet tells me that there's something different that Jesus is doing while also just in my experience following Jesus, being his apprentice and being in hospitality, thinking that man there is something truly commanded as Rob was talking about where seeing people fully and being with them and sharing and mutual generosity, I think it contextualizes heaven on earth. So good.

Yeah. Rachel, what would you add? Yeah, I think for Me, Hospitality is a really big concept to try and understand. So the easiest way that I understand it is service and safety. Most people.

Yeah, most people, I think, really want to belong somewhere and they don't know how to do it, and they don't belong anywhere. And I think there is no faster way. Sorry, there's no faster way to get to a place of safety than to serve someone. Well, it makes people feel like you want them there and that it's intentional and that you value them. If you're serving them in really, really small ways, even like pouring them a cup of coffee or washing their dishes, pull that down just a little bit away from you.

There you go. Yeah, you're welcome. I was like, this is going to drive me nuts. I'm going to be hospitable to you. Yeah.

Hospitality doesn't happen fast. No. Right. So how does this play out in your workplace? How would you go about hospitality?

Or bring that to the shops? You can go first, Matt. All right. Well, I think what it takes is creativity and partnering with the Holy Spirit. I could just clock in and clock out in our space, but even just the physical environment, we have a very open bar where anybody could sit, you have to talk with people.

And I think that's something we don't find a lot in our culture, spaces where you have to talk to people. And so I think beyond just clocking in, clocking out, giving somebody a coffee, something we all do is we have a barista who loves video games and has a sticker book full of video game characters. And if somebody comes in and they're sharing about how they like video games, we'll go pull the book out and be like, you mean this one? And they'll get the sticker that matches their interest along with their overpriced coffee. But like, it.

It's something that is more than just the bare minimum, but trying to, like, really enjoy a person who's coming in, even if, you know they're in and out, just grabbing their coffee, enjoying their presence, enjoying being with them. I love that. Just the mutuality of that.

Really quick. You didn't tell this story in the first service, but about the Morocco tv. Can you share that? Yeah, for sure. I had one international student who came in and was getting their coffee, and I don't know how I got chatting with him, but I started chatting with him on the job, and I'm outside chatting with him and I find out he's from Morocco.

And I had been to Morocco for a summer with some missionaries and so we were just talking all about Morocco. I had questions for him, he had questions for me. And in that moment, especially for these international students who, for a lot of them, this is their first time living in the States. Being in this context, it just felt so, like, warm to be with someone and to be where he had been and just sharing that together. He came in the next day and dropped something off for me.

And when I came in, one of my baristas was like, hey, this was dropped off for you. And it was a box with Arabic all over it. And we opened it up and it was Moroccan mint tea, which we had been talking about. And so there was a mutuality, even in the sense of I had provided a space where he felt like home, and he provided me with his culture and with remembrance of my trip to his home. That's so good.

I'm so struck by the fact that Jesus invited himself into so many people's homes. Yeah, right. And there is something really vulnerable about that. Where it's not, I think, when we are hosting, when we are extending hospitality, we. It's our

house, you know, and we are in control of that space.

But there's something really vulnerable about saying, hey, I'm coming over to your house today, and kind of asking them to welcome you in. And so I love that mutuality. Yeah. Rachel, how does this play out in your workplace? Yeah, there are just a million and one things that you can focus on in a day in any job.

But I think lots of times, because there are so many choices, it can get really difficult to decide, oh, my gosh, what do I spend the next five minutes on? How do I show hospitality in this next five minutes or half an hour or whatever it might be. And lots of times I think back to Mary and Martha, how they approached Jesus so differently, and one of them ends up being rebuked. But they have such different skills and tendencies. And sometimes it might be serving someone in really tangible ways of washing dishes or providing a meal or taking care of someone's needs.

And then sometimes it might be recognizing that somebody just needs a minute and an interaction, interaction and a conversation for you to just sit down with them or across from them and look in their eyes and treat them like a human. And I think following the Holy Spirit's leading as to what someone needs in a moment, because it can be really different. Sometimes you have to say, you know what, the dishes are going to wait because this person is having a rough day, or they just need me to be with them. And sometimes you're going to say, oh my gosh, you're late for a doctor's meeting. I'm going to serve you really well and really tangibly so that you can go on with your day.

And it can just look so different, like Mary and Martha. It just depends on where God has you. In a moment. How do you think about, as we're talking about extending hospitality to the stranger, to the outsider, to the foreigner, to the one that doesn't fit? You know, it's like, how do you think about that particular aspect of God's hospitality in and through you?

Yeah, I think one of the really big benefits of being in this industry is that you get really confident that somebody doesn't show up unless they want to. They're there for a reason. And it might be buying the overpriced coffee, but usually it's to get something more from you. And even if somebody is really, really different from me, they have a completely different lifestyle or culture or, or economic background. It's given me a lot of confidence to approach them like they do want to be there.

They do want me to ask them questions, to know a little bit about them. And even if I say all of the wrong things and ask all of the wrong questions, just by asking, they're going to feel free to say, oh, actually that's not how that is. Or let me tell you about this, or let me tell you this story. And then I get to actually have an interaction, even if it's really quick. Yeah, yeah, I'd love to tell a story of a regular that we have at the shop.

He started coming to the shop last year and he doesn't like coffee and he's not a Christian, so he's nothing like me. Totally foreign and stranger to me. But he started coming to our coffee shop and he has a specific shop or spot in our bar, coffee, bar area. And as he's been coming, we've developed a friendship. I've asked him a bunch of questions about his life.

He's been asking me about my life. And one day he brought in a friend and I was meeting the friend and his friend was just like super Christian. And I was like, yes, awesome. God's working in his life. I'm praying that just like Jesus would see him through me, through his friend.

It seems like God's up to something.

One day recently, him and his Christian friend came into the coffee shop. He sat in his spot and he looked so different. He. His posture, his eyes, it was just so.

He was really out of place. And his friend just kept talking over him and to him and they're like whispering and it was interesting and weird. And so I took note of this. I kept making my drinks and his friend, this is all I heard his friend say to him. He's like, hey, man, I'm so grateful we can have talks like this.

I'm so grateful that you're open to talk about this. Like, this is a really good chat. Even though he was the only one really

talking the whole time. And his Christian friend left and I, I went to my regular and I was like, hey, like, is everything okay? And he looks up and just all the blood is leftist face, he's super pale and he's like, I don't know what just happened.

And I asked him, hey, I'm about to be on lunch break in an hour, would you like to go on a walk with me? And he said, yes. And so we go on our walk and I come to found that his friend had been speaking to him and in some really unhelpful ways was explaining Christianity and was in some really unhelpful ways, overbearing on him, his faith. And so we talked about it for a while and this regular, as we're on this walk outside, looks at me and he's like, you're a Christian, right? I was like, yeah.

And he's like, tell me what you think. And so we start chatting and we're walking back to the coffee shop and he says before we go in the door, he goes, I'm just so grateful somebody saw that I was like in distress.

And then he was like, are you a hugger? And I was like, yeah. And so I gave him a hug and we walked back inside the coffee shop. And I just think it's so cool that he went from a moment of being in distress to being curious towards Jesus and that because there was an intention towards him, he was seen to be in that moment and just really needing somebody to walk with him, talk with him, ask him questions, and give him a hug. That's not in my job description, but I think it's in Jesus job description for us.

Rachel, just to wrap this up, you said something to the tune of I want to make this a life thing instead of a seasonal thing. Can you speak more to that? Yeah. Hospitality is really hard to practice. That's why not a lot of people do it in day to day life.

It is honestly almost easier to get paid to do it than to just have to do it around all of my other things in life. But it really is Something that we see Jesus modeling. So it's something that I want to model too. Not just when I'm getting paid to do it, but it also comes with a lot of time and energy and resources. And it can be really easy to come at it from a place of like, what do I have to give and how can I make this work?

And really, that is just how you get to burnout very quickly. You can be going super strong and be really social, meeting so many people for about a year and a half and then just be like, this isn't worth it. This isn't working for me. I'm totally out. And it's only when you come at it or when I come at it from a place of this isn't my love or my resources or my time to give.

It's coming from Jesus. And I really don't have the energy to do this today or have this conversation or be a loving example of a friend who will ask a good question. But I can find those things in Jesus and I can go to him for them. And that is how I hopefully will be able to do this for the long term. Not just for a season or a day where I feel really good, but in really hard moments, really inconvenient moments when you're in a rush and there's like 45 minute waits and people are screaming at you and you can still provide the care and the love that Jesus has for them.

Oh, good friend Sharon says to ask the question, what does love require? Such a profound question. Thank you both.

Coming back to as we wrap up Romans 12, Eugene Peterson translates the first couple verses like this. Love from the center of who you are. Don't fake it. Be good friends who love deeply. Practice playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out, Rachel. Keep yourselves fueled in a flame. Be alert, servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times. Pray all the harder.

Help the needy. And then this line. Be inventive in hospitality. When love is difficult, be inventive. Be creative, be courageous, be curious.

Be present with hospitality. This is a table of grace, and it's a table of generosity. This is a table of reconciliation and bridge building. This is a table of inclusivity and belonging. The table is never merely in here or out there.

It is the continued space where you are living.

So you bring yourself to God's table and you're welcoming those around you to it, making space for them in our schedules, in our comfort level, in our community and in our lives. The deliberate acts of love indiscriminate grace, abundant mercy, creative care. Be those people.

Pray. God, thank you for your hospitality to us. You are extravagant. You are beyond what we could possibly ask or imagine in your love and affection. We want to emulate you.

We want to love like that. I pray that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart that aches for those who have yet to experience your love. We pray God to emulate your heart for the poor and the lonely, for the stranger and the outcast. Thank you Jesus that you are the one who eats with sinners and we have tasted of your grace. We fall in that category and we want to make space at the table.

So we pray that you would give us, individually and collectively, your heartbeat. Thank you for next week and all of the opportunities to connect with people who are doing really, really good work in our community. Help us to get beyond just our wallet to actually in the dirt of ministry, to come alongside in the way that you have come alongside us, to be among, in with in a way that expresses your light and life. So we pray all of that in the name and for the glory of Jesus. Amen.