**Jubilee a time of celebrating Hospitality**

**Rev. Najla Kassab**

**Dear Partners, friends and leadership at URC**

**This is a time of Celebration for God’s faithfulness in journeying with the United Reformed Church. This is a time to thank God for the past, hold firm for the possibilities of the present and hope for the future. I am so grateful to God for the possibility to meet after difficult days where the world was shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, The pandemic situation has opened our eyes on many challenges and realities that affirmed the need for the church to question what does the Lord require of us as a church today? What role does the church has today and how does the church face the new reality that the world is facing. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the injustices that surrounds the world whether it is social, political and economic. It exposed inequality, exploitation and oppression that are rooted in economic systems that exploited the dignity of people where healthcare and other fundamental rights are only available to those who can afford it. Almost everywhere the vulnerable, poor and marginalized are most affected by the disease, and by the measures of disease control.**

**Today we look also at the continued wars that have affected human dignity and mainly the latest war in Ukraine. We continue to see the children scared and more refugees, more instability and more questions around how would the Lord use us in these difficult days. How do we celebrate today as a Church in the Midst of all the suffering.**

**How can we be an impactful church today? What is the church called to today?**

**John and Mary were celebrating their 30th wedding Anniversary. They worked hard to make this night a special night. After checking on the best restaurants in town. They found a nice restaurant. The reservation was made at 7 at night and they made sure that they got the best table. But John got caught in meetings, and he was late. Mary was angry. The couple reached late to their Anniversary dinner and they were tense and troubled. Angela the waiter noticed that they were not well. She approached their table and offered them 2 glasses of wine. We did not order this said Mary in a troubled voice. I know said Angela, it is just that I noticed you were troubled and wanted to help you feel better. Angela was hospitable. She was not merely serving the couple, doing things in the proper way but rather she was living hospitality, caring for how they feel. She was thinking about them, their frustration and how she can create positivity. When we talk about hospitality it is thinking about others and how they feel.**

In the world of hotelier, There is a difference between service and hospitality. In service we are interested to present what we learned, while in hospitality we are concerned with how the people feel. **Hospitality is about them not us. It is not merely service but rather a way to make people happy, respected, and dignified. It is stepping in their shoes and trying to lessen their struggle and pain and make them happy, or even get them out of their misery.**

One of the most interesting and confusing biblical texts about Hospitality are found in Luke with 2 well known stories: **The good Samaritan** ( Luke 10: 25-37) **The story of Mary and Martha**, ( Luke 10 :38-42) The two stories put side to side different perceptions about Hospitality. The first story speaks about a person coming to Jesus asking about who is my neighbor. And Jesus tells him **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25-37&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25399c)**] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.**

**The Samaritan was the hospitable one, while the Priest and the Levite were far from Hospitality.**

Henry Neumann, a Catholic priest in his book “ Reach out “ says:

***Hospitality is a fundamental attitude towards our fellow human beings, it means to create a free space 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 and transformation can take place besides spiritual growth.***

**The church is called for Hospitality to create new spaces where we are renewed by Hospitality, where we dare to be in new space, where we accept the invitation to the table set by God and the invited and inviting are both shaped anew.. The corona virus has created distancing, self-centeredness, fear from the other. It is time that the church to live hospitality inviting the struggling and marginalized around us.**

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan was ready to create a free space; to meet a stranger, and to learn from this new encounter. If you interviewed the Samaritan before the encounter, he would have never guessed that he would end up bandaging his wounds, putting him on his own donkey, and brought him to an inn and paid his money for his recovery”

When we get in this new free space we are changed, the helped and the helper. The Good Samaritan and the wounded; Our task as a church is to create free space and learn more about God in this encounter. According to the first story, Hospitality is to go outside the circle and the regular and to feel with the pain of the people and to act accordingly trusting that God will change us in this new space. **What is strange in this story is that those who were supposed to be hospitable missed it and the Samaritan was the one who was ready to take the risk.**

Hospitality is to take the risk in stepping into a new space and I believe this is the same risk that Jesus took as he was incarnated in our humanity.

The second story is the story of Mary and Martha which poses a challenging understanding for hospitality. At a quick glance at the story, Martha represents the real hospitable person. Martha symbolizes the model of hospitality, who was welcoming Jesus in her house and serving him with Middle Eastern Hospitality to the extent that she was distracted with much serving and she came to Jesus complaining **“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me**.” As a Middle Eastern, I understand Martha very well since we show our love through hospitality, but what was shocking is that Jesus did not appreciate all this Hospitality, and said “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; **42**one thing is needful . Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.”

What do we learn from this story about Hospitality, Hospitality is not mere actions, as you open a soup kitchen, or café for refugees, give them food and housing. Or rushing from one task to another, But rather with **What spirit we do hospitality, affects the impact of hospitality.** Hospitality is not as act of pity but is rooted in our faith. It is not a troubled experience but an experience where we ask our lord what do you need from us and how do you want us to live our faith? It is not a troubled experience but rather sitting at the feet of the lord and experience the new space where God shapes us.

In Lebanon the Presbyterian Church in Lebanon started schools for the Syrian refugee children. At the beginning some members of our churches were against such hospitality, they thought that this will trouble our church and this should not be our responsibility. Some of them were afraid that these children will end up staying in Lebanon. But many of our congregation looked at them as children of God who deserve to be protected from the streets, and enjoy dignified life and learn to read and write. I want to say that this ministry shaped who we are as the church today; we even discovered that unless we reflect hospitality in our daily life, then we have missed the real meaning of the Gospel and the love of God to all people. Unless we are ready to cross to new space we do not grow as Christians. This is why many young people look at the church as monotonous and boring. Unless you discover a new space to live your faith, you will end up doing the regular, the service, but not hospitality.

Today the world is threatened with radical attitudes, where radicalism did creep to our minds. Hospitality is one way to cure the world from radicalism. To allow a new encounter of humanity aside from terms as we are the good ones and you are the bad ones. (This is the thinking behind radicalism), but rather we will meet each other to learn more from each other on how we can be better humans who need to learn daily how to love our neighbor, whether our neighbor is another church or another religion.