

First Baptist Church of Augusta

Job 31:32

Romans 12:9-18

An Open Door: Welcoming

September 21, 2008

Stewardship 2008

This morning for our stewardship we consider the important open door before us: *Welcoming*.

“Won’t You Stay for Supper?” My grandmother uttered these words every time we had someone drop in around mealtime. I personally believed it was a biscuit conspiracy that was out to threaten me my supper intake. Yet every polite southerner knows that whenever you have guests arrive around mealtime, you ask them, “Won’t you stay for supper?” Now one doesn’t expect anyone to actually accept the invitation. It’s just considered good manners and a sign of hospitality. Well, I remember one time someone did accept my grandmother’s invitation. To be honest with you it baffled us all! Our guest was either hungry or felt at home.

As we prepare to enter the door of welcoming, I want you to think of your image of home. What does the image of home conjure up for you? For some, it is the longing to go back to a literal place – house, a kitchen, a table, even a meal. For others, it is the image of a time in one’s past when you were a child or when your own children were younger.

Not everyone has a positive experience of home, but I believe we all have a longing for home.

Have you ever thought the role that a church plays in providing a home for one another? Here I am, not simply talking about membership, but belonging. Isn’t it tremendous to feel welcomed?

Hospitality is evangelism. Providing a place at the table is sharing the good news. *There are two questions I want us to consider this morning. The first is:*

Who is the Stranger?

We are taught early in life to fear the stranger. So, I confess that the word itself is not necessarily a good one. Yet, it is a Biblical word.

Who is the stranger? The dictionary defines it as an unfamiliar person, a newcomer, an outsider, a visitor or guest, a person unaccustomed to something, or an alienated person. The Bible uses various names for “the stranger,” including alien, pilgrim, and sojourner.

Here is something else that I find interesting: from the Old Testament to the New, scripture spends as much time focusing on the importance of welcoming those outside our community as inside our community.

There are the examples of how Abraham welcomed strangers and how his family was welcomed in his travels. In Leviticus, several chapters are dedicated to the importance of taking care of the aliens or strangers, because it was a holy duty. Jesus said in Matthew 25, that we will be judged on how we welcome strangers, for in doing so, we welcome Christ (Matthew 25:35). Just a few weeks ago, I preached a message based on Acts 10, which was the pivotal event where Christianity moved from being a localized faith within Judaism to a global inclusion for all people. In Hebrews, we are taught to take care how we welcome strangers, because we could be entertaining angels unaware.