



## *Richmond Hill Reflections*

**“Extending Hospitality”** (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

October 6, 2019; Community Welcome Sunday (Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Reading: Luke 10:38-42; Excerpt from “Sarah Laughed” by Sarah Dylan Breyer (blog post for Proper 22C)

What a great day. We’ve thrown open the doors in broad hospitality. It’s not something we often do as United Church folks. We tend to hide our congregational light under a bushel, not afraid someone will blow it out, but not wanting to extinguish theirs. It’s understandable. We know the history of Christianity. We know how church and colonialism got tied up with each other. And yet, here we are. We got over our fear. Wanting to share what we love about RHUC we extended invitations to friends, neighbours, classmates and colleagues. We’re so glad you took us up on it.

Hospitality is a big part of the Luke reading this morning. I won’t rehash it, but there are details to point out. The first is that for Mary to listen to Jesus was surprising. Martha showed hospitality in an expected way, preparing food, serving her guests. Everything she did was a blessing to those invited into her home. Mary showed hospitality too as she sat at Jesus’ feet. It was a blessing - or would have been seen as such if she wasn’t a woman. We tend to overlook this cultural and historical detail. In an earlier time, we’d likely sympathize with Martha, shocked that Mary left her to do the work, but in our time, we tilt in the other direction, affirming Mary’s choice and wondering why Martha didn’t join her. As he corrects Martha and affirms Mary, Jesus challenges expectations.

Note as well that Jesus didn’t suggest Martha’s part was unimportant. He simply told her to focus on what she was doing and leave Mary to hers. While the way Mary chose to show hospitality clearly shocked her sister, it was a blessing even if cultural norms said otherwise. Perhaps more so because she did what she felt she should. Jesus was pleased by this, pleased she chose to learn from him. That is key for me. Though this is a story about Martha and Mary welcoming Jesus, he is the one who truly welcomes, affirming Mary’s and Martha’s choices, gifts and passions. Like I shared with the children, he wants us to let our light shine. In the kitchen Mary would have felt like she was hiding hers under a bushel. It’s the same with me but for a different reason. If I’m in the kitchen, I’d burn everything to a crisp. That’s Glen’s gift and passion, and not mine.

Like Mary and Martha, we’re invited to shine. This is something we try to do here, especially as an Affirming Ministry. It may challenge church status quo but we feel it aligns with how Jesus lived to affirm that everyone is loved as they are. What’s essential is not where you’re from, how you look, whom you love, when you were born; but that you’re you, I’m me, we’re both children of G-d, children of the earth. As much as we’re siblings, we all have unique gifts and stories that shape how

we see the world. Hospitality means being open to each other's views. A different perspective often offers a path to growth, a new solution to an ongoing problem, an approach that broadens my understanding of the world. I know I've been shaped by having been born in the UK and raised in this culture as my parents adapted to Canada as immigrants. The process of coming out as a gay man was transformative. So was moving West to work in Indigenous communities. All of my experiences have shaped me. And each person I met left an imprint on who I am and how I see the world. They were a spiritual gift too. The mystery at the heart of life that we call G-d, is beyond comprehension. No one teaching or image is complete. As people talked to me about who G-d was to them, and I shared my view, we painted a more whole picture. Even now conversations shape my viewpoint.

Honouring one another also means accepting we have different needs. I need to not just affirm my gifts but be attentive to the gifts of who I'm with. If someone looks a bit lost, I should stop and say hi. If English is not their first language, I need to take time to listen, seek understanding, communicate with my heart. It may be easier to be with someone else, but does that nurture a relationship? Similarly, as more extroverted, if I'm chatting with someone more introverted, I need to give time for pauses, not cut them off. In this way we both get to express who we are.

As much as what I've shared speaks to how we should be with one another within these walls, it has impact in the wider community. As our second reading pointed out, faith is less about what we think or say than it is about what we do. Jesus invites us to imitate him in the world. And so just as his acceptance of Mary challenged the status quo of his culture, we're called to do the same. As we well know we're in an election campaign. It's highlighted how we're less tolerant than we would like to believe. I'm sure you heard that while Jagmeet Singh, leader of the NDP, was campaigning in a market, a passerby told him he should cut off his turban to look Canadian. Bless him that in his gentle way he rejoiced that in Canada no one needs to look a certain way. But the incident reminds us that there are racist and prejudiced attitudes around us, and they are more common than we'd like to think. We pride ourselves on being a cultural mosaic rather than a melting pot. That decision went against the status quo of Europe as well as the US. It is to our ultimate gain, but it takes effort. As we become more diverse, we can react with fear, or we can model how Jesus affirmed Mary and Martha and be open to other's viewpoints and ways of life.

So, as we extend hospitality here, we don't do so in isolation but modeling how we're to be in the world. One of the gifts of Jesus was the way he honoured people as they were. In accepting them, he not only invited them to shine with light and love, but they in turn felt affirmed to invite others to shine as well. I believe that when we all get to shine, the reign of G-d will come. So may we all shine and continue inviting others to do the same. Amen.