

***HOST AND GUEST* IMAGE OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS (JEAN KIM)**

1. INTRODUCTION:

While I was working with homeless population, and finally founded and served the Church of Mary Magdalene, a homeless women's congregation in Seattle, I felt that all I did, as a social workers, a mental health counselors and a pastor was hosting the broken-hearted people through counseling, comforting, feeding, singing, praying and worship service and other programs because the image of Jesus as a host motivated me to do so. I decided to write this little piece of essay hoping to be useful to motivate churches to offer warm hospitality to the homeless.

2. JESUS, THE INCARNATE OF THE HOST GOD

God created the first human family as a community. In this God's household, where God was the host and the rest were God's guests, God expected them to live in peace and harmony caring for and hosting one another. This God's home was filled with everything abundantly they needed including food, water, fruits, vegetables, animals, and rivers. Meeks calls this "God the economist."

The root of Greek word economy, *oikonomia*, is a compound of *Oikos*, household, and *nomos*, law or management. Therefore, economy means literally "the law or the management of the household." Household is connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life. Economy of God is the distribution of God's righteousness. *IF* the righteousness of God is present and where God is hosting, there is always enough to around (Meeks: 1989: 12).

Into this household, Jesus was sent to host all the lost, broken, excluded, poor, sick and homeless into God's household. He was also an image of God who came into human history as a guest to be cared for by other's hospitality in the world.

The Greek word for host and guest is the same word, *zenos*, and another Greek word for hospitality is *philozenia* which means love of strangers. It implies that one is always ready to serve and care for those who are strangers and pass his or her way. The Latin word for hospitality is *bustus* which means both stranger and enemy, which brings in the aspect of risk involved in being hospitable. When people are truly hospitable, they are willing to host a total stranger, not knowing whether that person is friend or enemy. In Latin, guest is *hostis*, also means stranger/ enemy. Therefore, to be hospitable is to convert the *hostis* into *hospes*, the enemy into a guest (Source: Luther Place – A Church As Hospice, Washington DC).

Guest is usually don't belong to the host's household and is in transient and host is always ready to risk his own life in offering hospitality to the guests.

3. IMAGE OF HOST JESUS

According to Prof. Plantinga, Louisville Theological Seminary, "God hosts us in the world. Even before we knock, God graciously opens the door for us. Even before we ask for food, God spreads a table before us. One of the most pervasive images of human salvation in scripture is the banquet table, with God serving as generous host. Salvation is feasting in the kingdom of God, where people will come from north, south, east and west to sit at the table together. Their fellowship will shatter boundaries of language and culture and past enmity. In Jesus' fellowship meals, in the home of Pharisees or of Gentiles, surrounded by thousands or

alone with his disciples, hints of this joyful communion begin to heal the pain and brokenness of human life (Campbell: 12-13).

As the Gospel of John presents, Jesus is our bread and drink for us (John 6: 48, 54 -56):

He said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Jesus feed us himself as our food as a sacrificial host; He feeds us his words, values, ideals, love, justice.

Jesus was a street host in Galilee, Nazareth and other areas feeding poor souls with good news or the hungry fatigued, and needy crowd with physical food (Luke 9;10-17), and hosting all afflicted and excluded people through healing (Luke 5:12; 6: 6 -19; 8:26-39), or dining with them (Luke 5:29-32) or invite them in- “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame- (Luke 14:21) (Maynard-Reid: 72).

Maynard-Reid interprets that this dinner represents the reign of God to which the marginal and outcasts are invited. Luke 4:18 and 6:20 and this banquet portray the gospel, the good news for the poor (Maynard-Reid: 73).

4. IMAGE OF JESUS AS A HOMELESS GUEST

Jesus’ Personal and Social Background will help us understand why Jesus seemed to understand the poor, hungry and homeless better than anyone else in his time and today. Jesus himself was poor: Jesus’ birth took place in a strange city without hospitality. The new-born Jesus was laid in a manger because there was no bed for him while his parents were traveling

(Luke 2: 6-7). His birth also precipitated a blood bath of genocide. So Jesus' family escaped into exile and spent years as refugees in a foreign country (Henderson: 88). So the infant Jesus was raised as a refugee in Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15).

According to Bernard Brandon Scott, Jesus was Galilean, Jewish and peasant. He came from the bottom of society. He was landless. According to Borg, "Jesus probably became a woodworker (in Greek, *tekton*). The word *tekton* was different from *carpenter*. A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who still owned a small piece of land. A *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land"(Borg P. 26).

Robert Funk would add that "Jesus' home was semipagan Galilee, whose inhabitants, because they were often of mixed blood and open to foreign influence, were despised by the ethnically pure Judeans living to the south. Jesus was a Jew" (Funk P. 33). Henderson adds that Jesus arrived on the scene and operated from the very margin of society. (Henderson:87). Jesus also spent most of his ministry in the midst of the poor. Jesus was poor having no regular income during his public ministry. Nor did he have a home of his own saying, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58; Matt.8:20). He sent out disciples with very little to sustain them (Luke 9:3; 10:4) (Sider:1997:49). Jesus died homeless (Matt. 27:46; My God, why are you forsaking me?). Borg describes, "it was social world of crisis"

Before the first century was over, the crisis had resulted in catastrophic war with Romans, climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. (Borg: 1987:80). Two Social World in Collision By the first century. The annexation of Palestine by Rome in 63 B.C. generated both political conflict and severe economic pressure (Borg: 1987: 83). Double taxation to Rome and tithes to the temple created growing number of landless day laborers, widespread emigration, and a social class of robbers and beggars. Economic pressure was paramount (Borg: 1987: 85). The Roman occupation, brought a crisis into all aspects of Jewish life, religious, political, and social (Borg: 1987: 86).

Jesus is among the homeless as a guest. In Matt. 25: 35-36, 40, 42-43,45, Jesus says that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the imprisoned and welcome the homeless we have done these acts for Jesus himself and when don't do it for our hungry, naked, sick, imprisoned and homeless brothers and sisters we haven't don't it for Jesus himself (25: 31-46). Therefore, Jesus seems to identify with them and he is among the homeless guests.

Explanation of the art work.

The art work was done by an artist, Ms. Turtle in Bainbridge Island, Washington, on behalf of the Church of Mary Magdalene that I developed and served for 7 years in Seattle, WA. The Church Board requested her to draw it for my retirement gift. It was in the newspaper of the Church Council of Greater Seattle with article written by Inez Allan with a title under the picture "Jean



Walks On the Water." I had neither knowledge of the art work nor the article until the evening of celebration for my retirement: I am pulling a boat on the water which is full of homeless women and Jesus is among them. The sign on the boat reads "End Homelessness," which has been the

theme of my mission. Someone couldn't have done a better job than this art work to include Jesus among homeless guests and also express my commitment to homeless mission.

4. JESUS, HOST and GUEST

But at the center of the Christian story is also a startling reversal of roles: in Jesus Christ, God comes to dwell among us as guest; as a homeless baby; as an adult with no place to lay his head; as a convict, abandoned and scorned by others. He epitomizes the needy stranger, dependent on the hospitality of others. He asks for hospitality from a Samaritan woman (John 4) and a rich tax collector, Zacchaues (Luke 19) and receives it gladly from many others. In their hospitality to "the least" among them, his disciples from all times and places continue to discover that they are hosting their Lord. God comes in Christ as generous and gracious host but also as needy and grateful guest (Campbell: 14).

Jesus as a guest of Samaritan woman asking for water to drink and then turned into a host offering her life-giving water. Jesus stayed in Samaria as a guest but then turned into a host offering them reconciliation, hope and salvation.

To Zacchaues' home, Jesus invites himself as a guest but then he turned into a host announcing "today salvation has come to this house" when Zacchaues announced "I will give half of my possessions for the poor" (Luke 19:1-10).

Women, who were Jesus' guests by receiving healing and grace also supported Jesus and his disciples as hostesses with their own resources. They also played a role of hostesses for Jesus at

the cross by being there with him during his suffering and at graveside grieving and watching his grave after his death. As resurrection witness, women invited the whole world to the banquet of Jesus' table of the good news of salvation.

5. THE CRUCIFIED HOST-GUEST

Jesus causes the greatest offense by offering home to the marginal people, the homeless and sinners, and by offering good news to the poor and the exploited (Luke 7:23)" (Meeks:1989:116).

This subversive host/guest was fiercely rejected by the world because he put the world, ethics, and life upside down and inside out. People who were used to host themselves couldn't take sacrificial host who emptied himself to host others. People, the Jews and Romans, had to get rid of him from the earth. Because he was a threat to their greedy life style. But his ideal, Spirit, ethic, value, to love others and host the needy live forever and ever in the hearts of many in the past, present and future world.

6. CHALLENGE

The most striking example texts to contemporary Christians may come from the story of a rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-32) and a story of rich fool (Luke 12:13- 34) who didn't host anyone except themselves.

In the parable of rich fool (Luke 12: 13-34), Jesus speaks out against the abundance of possessions of the rich. In the parable, Jesus focuses on the accumulation of goods. For holding

onto so many possessions and refusing to share, he is declared a fool. This rich fool only thinks of himself without any concern for others. God tells him that his life will be required of him that very night. Jesus declares, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21) (Maynard-Reid: 83). As Meeks contends,

this parable shatters the seductive hold of life centered in self-definition of wants (Luke 12:13-34). The landowner builds new and bigger barns to store a bumper crop in order to play the futures market or as security for an early retirement and a life of ease. By playing upon scarcity he profits from the needs of others. Not only has the rich man threatened his neighbor with the loss of livelihood, but he has also disabled his own life through hoarding. The ultimate damnation of avarice is that it leads to loneliness; “Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land” Isa. 5:8). (Meeks: 1989:176).

In the other parable of a rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-32), Jesus’ overriding concern is what the rich did or didn’t do with their great possessions. This rich man has no concern at all for the poor man Lazarus who sat at his gate. Both these wealthy persons in chapter 12 and 16 are condemned because they have failed to share their abundance with those who lack even basic necessities. They didn’t host anyone but themselves. By rejecting opportunities to share and host, they bring themselves the loss of life (Luke 12:20) and the tormented Hades (Luke 16:23). Properly mourned and interred, the rich man experiences the hell that the poor Lazarus had known in his lifetime. The great chasm is fixed. God’s justice turns everything upside down. (Meeks: 1989:122); (Wogman:14)

Critique of churches: Henderson contends that with the “Constantinianization” of the church, it essentially became the chaplain to the empire in return for the cessation of persecution.

(Henderson :145).

As Shenk agrees, from being a marginal, socially inferior, and economically weak group, the church became one of the dominant institutions in society. It acquired immense wealth and political power. From being an oppressed minority, the church now became an oppressor.

(Shenk: 1993:19).

McNeal asserts that we Christians in the church have been great about speaking the truth *without love* (Eph.4:15) (McNeal: 38).

Bishop Robert Morgan of the Mississippi Area has declared that we have not only found it easier in North America to build new sanctuaries than to form Christian disciples, not only more palatable to study the Bible than to live it out, but also more appealing to engage in social action than to confront people with the challenge of Jesus Christ (Meeks: 1995: 127).

As John Driver argues, the church moved farther and farther from its roots in Jesus of Nazareth, the content, the methods, and goal of evangelization has moved from the creation of Jesus' likeness in his followers to the formation of orthodox believers who receive the appropriate sacraments and assent to correct doctrines. More serious consequence is the tendency to privatize salvation, accompanied by an almost exclusively individualistic evangelistic practice (Shenk: 1993:199-200).

During my speaking tour for 7 years, I have observed the following three models of

contemporary churches: 1) *The Country Club Model* tends to be exclusive, other worldly, focused on spiritual or personal salvation and blessings, and locks up the church to keep “the homeless” away. They host themselves. 2) *The Send a Check Model* tends to repeat what the country club model does but sends checks to charity programs. Although we need checks to do programs, they too are removed from homeless people. These two groups tend to share the FEAR of relating to homeless people and the misconception about the root causes of poverty and homelessness. 3) *The Christ Model* seems to be inclusive, welcoming, and opens up rooms in their church or temple facilities to invite the homeless in. These churches of Christ model do offer shelters, transitional homes, day centers, soup kitchen in church. This was hosting model.

McNeal diagnoses the North American church to suffer from severe mission amnesia (McNeal: 18-19). He further diagnoses that the church culture in North America is a vestige of the original movement, is a club where religious people can hang out with other people whose politics, worldview, and lifestyle match theirs (McNeal: 1). McNeal claims that people outside the church think church is for church people, not for them. They do not automatically think of the church as championing the cause of poor people or healing the sick or serving people. These are things they associate with Jesus, not with the church (McNeal: 12).

WHO ARE THE NEEDY GUESTS TODAY FOR CHURCH TO HOST

In our society where we have less than 6% of the world population, but own two thirds of the

world wealth and have 5 million millionaires and 276 billionaires and many of us benefit from the advanced technology, medicine, education, and all others. But 3.5 million people experience homelessness per year, nearly a million every night. Homelessness is growing, especially for women and children. More women go to prison. 40% of the homeless population are working poor. 35 million people have no medical insurance.

A Model Story of Hospitality

My name is Larry Boyce lived in San Francisco. I wasn't illiterate or unskilled like many homeless. I came from a fancy history of painting. But due to my health problem, I couldn't get a job and it didn't take long to throw me into homelessness. In San Francisco downtown vicinity I knocked many doors of churches of different denominations. When people answered the door, I said to them "I am Larry Boyce. I have AIDS and homeless. Would you trade my painting skill with a room for me to stay. I will paint your church. One by one they said "No." They seemed to be uncompassionate churches in a cold world. My body was slowly being taken over by the virus. My strength and energy were slowly sinking. I dragged my heavy legs and steps from one church to another just to get an cold answer NO. Who did I blame except myself but why did I call the church and world "cold" if I blame myself. Because perhaps I was expecting a thin string of love toward a person like me, forgive the kind of sickness I was dying with, and a little hospitality in the name of Jesus. But there was none as if churches had

nothing to do with the name of Jesus. Oh, Jesus, where do I go? My body is too sick to sleep on the sidewalk, which is cold and sometimes wet or frozen. I didn't have much strength to cry or yell. I kept knocking on church doors with NO answers up until I knocked the 12th church.

It was Old First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. I repeated my plea and heard unbelievable answer "YES," please come in by the pastor of the church. The Old First gave me a room first in the church and then a family to stay with. As I promised I started my painting in the ceiling of the northax of the sanctuary. When I painted in the office of the vice President of the United States I did it alone with full strength. But this time, I had some volunteers to help me. Some time later I couldn't climb up the latter any longer because I felt dizzy. I was standing on the floor and instructed my volunteers on the later to finish up. Soon after that I was hospitalized, baptized by the Old First Church pastor and became a member of that community of hospitality. I died 9 month after in the year of 1990. In the heaven I hear this little story is being carried around by many hospitable people including Jean Kim who tells the story all over the nation. It is not my story though. It is the story of the host who offered me the warm hospitality in the name of Jesus, for Jesus and with Jesus. Praised the Lord, Jesus.

(Larry Boyce turned out to be a very famous conceptual artist who painted the office for one of our Vice Presidents of the United States). This can be a case in which people hosted a stranger but turned out that they hosted an angel (Heb. 13:1-3).

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