**Seven Day Church**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

**August 21, 2016**

Just a few years ago, Pintrest was the newest craze. Everyone was pinning and sharing ideas with the world. For those who are not as familiar with Pintrest, let me try to describe it to you. Pintrest is an online social network site that allows you to share ideas and “steal” ideas from others in areas such as home décor, crafts, clothes, all things wedding related, birthday party ideas and much more. It is fountain of ideas that have changed the do-it-yourself market and the wedding industry. On the surface, Pintrest is the best thing since sliced break for practicing hospitality.

However, if you peel back the onion, what you will find are people who marvel at other people’s craftiness and their willingness to take chances. Some end up only living vicariously through what is shared rather than taking a chance and trying new things as Pintrest was intended. In addition, Pintrest can cause people to covet what other people might have or create. It can create a sense of “whatever-you-can-do-I-can-do-better” competition that can be harmful to one’s self-image. At its worst, it can cause someone to “freeze” because they feel like they cannot measure up; therefore failing to enjoy life to the fullest.

But take heart: practicing Christian hospitality isn't about glamorous table settings or platters of picture-perfect food or just the right kind of décor; it's about practicing servanthood. More importantly, it's about loving others through Christ and making people feel special.

Some Christians possess the gift of hospitality. We know those people who are wonderful hosts who make you feel wanted, needed and just flat out special. But, practicing hospitality isn’t just for those who have been given the spiritual gift.

Romans 12:13 command us to practice hospitality. 1 Peter 4:8-10 says, “Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God.”

In today’s text, we find one of the shortest books of the Bible. We assume that John is the author of the book but the writer only refers to himself as the elder in the letter. However, John is assumed to be the author due to the Johanian writing style that matched the gospel of John, the three letters found in 1, 2, 3 John and even Revelation. Presumably, we find John near the end of his life, some 60 years after first dropping the nets on the seashore to follow Jesus. By this time, he had outlived all of the other disciples but was exiled to the island of Patmos. After receiving some disturbing news that Diotrephes had led one of the churches in Asia Minor astray, John wrote to his friend Gaius to encourage him to continue to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Diotrephes had taken control of one of the churches there and used his power to ban certain travelling missionaries from coming to the church at all. At one point, the church had seen some leadership qualities in him and had placed him in charge, but now in the top spot, the power had gone to his head. He refused to welcome those traveling ministers of the gospel to preach and take rest with his church. And even worse, upon receiving an earlier correction from John, Diotrephes refused to listen.

Diotrephes refused to show hospitality to strangers, especially to those who were doing the work of the Lord. However, Christian hospitality has been a central part of our discipleship since the very beginning. Jesus did not have a home. He traveled from town to town, city to city, to teach, perform miracles and love others. Yet, he and the disciples were received into people’s homes to stay for the night.

Today, Christian hospitality is an important part of how we live out our discipleship. St. Benedict upheld that "hospitality maintains a prominence in the living (Christian) tradition . . . the guest represents Christ and has a claim on the welcome and care of the community." In other words, if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected within us and is showered on those with whom we come in contact.

Our third and final emphasis for our Strategic Plan is Practicing Hospitality:

*Hospitality to all is a mark of God’s kingdom. Abraham and Sarah welcomed 3 strangers who were angels (Genesis 18), and Rahab welcomed the Israelites (Joshua 2). Hebrews 13:2 commands us to “not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” The church is called to be present to its community through welcoming others to its facilities, ministries, and generosity. The true church will be a seven day church, available to its community on a regular basis.*

I owe a great deal to my mentor and friend, Jeff Roberts, for helping me to be a better minister. I learned a great deal by just watching and working alongside him. Under his leadership, Trinity Baptist Church became a welcoming and vibrant church. When the church built its recreation facility over ten years ago, he led the church to make a willful decision that it would not become a country club for its members. The gym, the walking track, the fitness room and the game room were open to all people in the community during the time the Recreation Outreach Center was staffed by volunteers. I am not sure whether it was a term he came up with or he borrowed from someone else, but the church’s intention was to become a “Seven Day Church,” rather than a Sunday-Wednesday Church. It truly created an environment of a welcoming and hospitable community.

Being a Seven Day Church means that we must first look for ways to practice Christian hospitality as individuals. The building is not the church. We are the church. Therefore, it begins with our daily walk with God. John commended Gaius for being faithful to the truth and continuing to walk in the truth everyday. (v. 3) That is what we are to do. As we walk in the truth, I believe the Spirit opens our eyes and our ears to the needs around us. In Matthew 25, Jesus reminds us that our inheritance of God’s kingdom in heaven will be given to those who walk in the truth. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me…For inasmuch as you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt. 25:35-40)

Christian hospitality is centered on building relationships with the people we meet. So often, I find myself looking past people because I am in too much of a hurry. When I am in that mode, I know that I am not being very hospitable. I don’t stop to share a smile with the person coming towards me. I don’t open the door for the person behind me. I don’t notice the person sitting off to the side. I miss opportunities to make connections and build friendships. But when I slow down and see the world around me, I notice people in need. I notice people who have a smile on their faces and we engage in a short conversation. I simply share the joy of living in community with one another. That is part of being a Seven Day Church…we take Church to those who are outside of these walls.

Being a Seven Day Church also means that we welcome others into our church building. Too often, churches can mimic our society. Just as we have retreated into our homes, locked the doors and put up a fence to keep others out to protect what we have, churches have done the same. Especially when churches begin to decline in number of people, it is a natural tendency to pull back, try to hold onto what it has and operate out of the mindset of scarcity rather than abundance.

Look around. Look around to one another and to the facilities we are in. Rather than focusing on what we lack, what if we focus on what we have to accomplish the mission? I believe we have been blessed with one of the larger facilities in our community. Why not put our assets to use! Why not open up our doors and let outside groups and other ministries utilize our facilities when they need larger spaces? Why not greet them as they come in and make them feel welcome and special?

Last Sunday was a prime example of what it means to be a church that is practicing hospitality. The cadets from Tarheel Challenge Academy are not in the program because everything is right in their lives. They have a great deal of obstacles to overcome. They need encouragement and support. Last week, I saw you greet them with a smile and warm hugs. I saw you provide a meaningful meal to them. I saw you serve them drinks, asked if they wanted more and just made them feel special. That is exactly what they need. They need to know that they are created in the image of our God and they are special in his kingdom.

Another way we do an exceptional job of practicing hospitality is with our bereavement ministry. When a family is going through a time of grief from a death of a loved one, it is vital that we surround them with love and care. When we can provide a luncheon for the entire family or a reception after the Celebration of Life, we make people feel special. We help them to know that they do not walk through the valley of shadow of death alone. We walk alongside them.

I wonder what more God is calling us towards? I wonder if there are more ways we can become a Seven Day Church, utilizing our greatest resources: our people and our facilities? I wonder how we might be better neighbors in our community as we walk in God’s truth and love? I can’t wait to see what God has in store!