

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on- since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

~Genesis 18:1-8

Chacaya, Guatemala: I heard the shift in the conversation. It was faint but each of us in that bare, unfinished classroom with cement floors and no electricity experienced it. The principal of the humble school in Chacaya, a small coffee plantation/village along the edge of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala, went from asking us for computers to telling us his story, some of which his family didn't even know. All of this happened because of a question asked by one of our fellow travelers: "How did you get here?" One, simple question and the Holy Spirit moved us deeper into relationship with one another. It was an amazing gift of hospitality to strangers. We were the strangers, sitting in his space, and he gave us the greatest gift: sharing some of his story.

Chimaltenango, Guatemala: I watched closely as her eyes widened, filling with tears. She swallowed hard and slowed her speech while sharing the harsh details of that awful day... that day her dad was kidnapped and murdered by the army. She would pause through her tears, as the translator spoke, and visibly relive the hurt and the pain of that terrible time in her life and in the life of her sisters, one of whom was sitting in the circle of women in the room with us. At that moment, I imagined Jesus sitting beside her, holding her, weeping as she wept. Each time a group of strangers comes to visit Corazon de Mujer ("Heart of Woman") in Chimaltenango, the women welcome them with hugs, a home-cooked meal and the sharing of a few of their survival stories from Guatemala's 36-year civil war, which ended in 1996. These women not only show hospitality to strangers, they pour out themselves into their weaving and in learning to read. They make beautiful scarves, stoles, and purses to earn an income, as several of the women are widows with children. Through their weaving and sharing they tell us that God is slowly healing them.

These and other stories from our time in Guatemala make me think of how I show hospitality to strangers. Professor Thomas W. Ogletree in his book, *Hospitality To The Stranger*, says, *to offer hospitality to a stranger is to welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our life-world. Strangers have stories to*

tell which we have never heard before, stories which can redirect our seeing and stimulate our imaginations. The stories invite us to view the world from a novel perspective. The stranger does not simply challenge or subvert our assumed world of meaning; she may enrich, even transform that world.

The truth is that we don't expect much out of strangers these days, much less transformation. Many times we live in fear, expecting the worst from people who are different from us: speak another language, are another skin color, wear a different type of clothes or live a different life style. These differences often make us afraid and even hostile. While in Guatemala, we were each offered the gift of hospitality over and over again, as person after person in different villages vulnerably shared while we attentively listened to their stories- stories that connected us with God and with one another.

In the scripture passage listed above, Abraham and Sarah welcome three complete strangers at Mamre. They roll out the red carpet, so to speak, for these three strangers. They invited them to rest and eat and share stories. It's as if they're entertaining God because they were. *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it* (Hebrews 13:2).

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) Do you think Abraham and Sarah knew that they were creating space for God to speak when they welcomed the three strangers?
- 2) How is welcoming strangers the same as welcoming God into your home, your life, your story?
- 3) When was the last time God, through a stranger, transformed you?

Prayer:

Thank you, God, for the gift of the transformation that took place for us in Guatemala and is still taking place wherever hospitality is offered in Your name!