

SPACE FOR HOSPITALITY: Ideas for a Thanksgiving Service

These worship resources remind worshipers that hospitality is an integral part of Thanksgiving. But biblical hospitality goes far deeper than typical table small-talk, “Good to see y’all! Can you pass the turkey and dressing?” Hospitality is messy because, in the kingdom, we’re called to entertain aliens and angels alike. Here are some materials to help you create space for reflecting on biblical hospitality in worship.

MAIN THEME: At Thanksgiving, we remember that we are called to extend more than a friendly meal to both loved ones and strangers.

CHOOSING SCRIPTURE // FOR THE FOUNDATION

The following passage from Hebrews lays out a thematic foundation for this service. Other passages support this theme and might be utilized throughout the service.

- ◆ Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
- ◆ Luke 14:1, 7-14
- ◆ Psalm 112
- ◆ Romans 15:4-13

CHOOSING MUSIC // FOR SINGING

- ◆ All are Welcome [Key of F]
Text and Music: Jesse Manibusan and Jennah Manibusan
© 2016 Spirit and Song®, a division of OCP
- ◆ All are Welcome [Key of F]
Text and Music: Marty Haugen
© 1994, GIA Publications, Inc.
- ◆ Welcome the Healer [Key of A]
Text and Music: Sean Curran, Brett Younker, Jess Cates, Brenton Brown, and Jourdan Johnson
© 2019 Capitol CMG Genesis | Capitol CMG Paragon | Generous Giver Music | sixsteps Music | sixsteps Songs | Sounds of Jericho | worshiptogether.com songs | Ponies Riding Shotgun

CREATING DRAMA // FOR HEARING

Use one of these videos from *The Work of the People* to consider more deeply the power of hospitality and how it is rooted in the biblical narrative.

- ◆ [America, Hospitality, and Salvation, featuring Parker Palmer](#)
- ◆ [Learning to Party Better, featuring Tom Sine](#)

- ◆ [The Hospitality of Us, featuring Suzanne Stabile](#)
- ◆ [Hospitality and Salvation, featuring Diana Butler Bass](#)
- ◆ [Toward the Other, featuring Brian McLaren](#)

FINDING ART // FOR SEEING



"The Trinity," By Andrei Rublev, Public Domain [From [here.](#)]

This piece is an icon created by Russian painter, Andrei Rublev, in the fifteenth century. It is one of the most famous icons of the Trinity, depicting the three angels who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (Genesis 18). Interpreted as an embodiment of the Trinity, the painting conveys divine unity, peace, harmony, love, and hospitality.



“Angels Unawares,” by Timothy Schmalz, bronze sculpture [From [here](#).]

“Angels Unawares” is a bronze sculpture by Timothy Schmalz. It was installed in St. Peter’s Square in the Vatican in 2019, in honor of World Migrant and Refugee Day. Pope Francis said he wanted the sculpture “to remind everyone of the evangelical challenge of hospitality.” It depicts a group of migrants and refugees on a boat wearing clothes that show they originate from diverse cultures and time periods.

LIVING WORSHIP // FOR DOING

Start a conversation in small groups before or after the worship service. What does hospitality look like in your church? While our culture associates it most closely with a Martha Stewart-esque home décor complete with fluffed pillows and fresh flowers, it means something quite different in Scripture. Just as we experience God’s gracious hospitality, so should we act as hosts who welcome and alien and the angel among us. Here are some questions to help guide the conversation:

- ◆ What comes to mind when you think of hospitality?
- ◆ How have you experienced hospitality—As a host? As a stranger? As a loved one?
- ◆ One of the songs listed above, “All are Welcome,” proclaims that all are, truly, welcome. It reads, “Welcome, all the broken-hearted, all who sorrow and despair....Welcome, all who suffer violence, all who long for safety and peace....Welcome, all who are forgotten, excluded and dignity denied....Welcome, all who work for justice, bringing hope, charity and peace.” In what ways does your church do these things?

- ◆ What would your church need to do to embrace this song’s vision more fully? What difference would it make in your worship?

MAKING SPACE // FOR WORSHIPING

- ◆ Since this service is centered around the Thanksgiving holiday, plan for a community meal after worship. Have tables in the back of the worship space or in another space so that worshipers can make time for community fellowship. Encourage worshipers to sit at tables with both strangers and friends.
- ◆ Host a canned goods drive for a local food bank. To further assist their efforts, call them in advance and publicize the exact items they need most. When the offering is taken in the service, ask worshipers to bring their goods to various stations around the worship space, received by assistants who can build canned pyramids to visualize this hospitality around the space.
- ◆ Don’t eliminate the “Hi! Nice to see/meet you” greeting time in this service. Whether it’s the norm or atypical at your church, highlight it today.

WRITING POETRY // FOR PRAYING

- ◆ To be a hospitable church, we need to craft a space where worshipers feel free and safe to tell their stories. Invite two church members—preferably worshipers of different ages—to share a story of how they once felt like a “stranger” but then were welcomed into God’s house. Encourage those sharing to consider ways in which we might be welcomed guests and warm hosts in God’s house.
- ◆ Print this quote in a worship guide or on a screen, from Frederick Buechner’s *Love Feast* (Harper, 1974):

The Kingdom of Heaven is a love feast where nobody’s a stranger. Like right here. There’s strangers everywhere else you can think of...There’s strangers got married and been climbing in and out of the same four-poster thirty-five, forty years, and they’re strangers still...We’re all scared and lonesome, but most of the time we keep it hid. It’s like everyone of us has lost his way so bad we don’t even know which way is home anymore, only we’re ashamed to ask. You know what would happen if we would own up we’re lost and ask? Why, what would happen is we’d find out home is each other. We’d find out that home is Jesus loves us lost or found or any which way.

“Strangers” are not simply “those we don’t know,” or “those not like us.” Pray that God would open our eyes to see how we might be ignoring the “strangers” who sit right next to us.

- ◆ The following prayer of thanksgiving and commitment would be an appropriate concluding prayer in this service:

*God, we are aliens and sojourners in this world,
but you invite us to be your guests.
You lavishly offer us your hospitality
and lovingly welcome us into your family,
You invite us to share in the abundance of your kingdom.*

God, you have shown us that providing hospitality to strangers opens a doorway into the Kingdom of God. Remind us that when we offer hospitality to others, we are receiving Christ into our midst and so fulfilling the law of love.

We open our hearts to embrace the stranger, the friend, the rich, and the poor. We open our lives to offer a generous heart toward all.

(Adapted from *A Litany of Hospitality*, by Christine Sine. Available [here](#).)

SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICE

Space for Hospitality // Hebrews 13:1-8; Luke 14:1, 7-14; Psalm 112; Romans 15:4-13 //
A Thanksgiving Service

MAIN THEME: At Thanksgiving, we remember that we are called to extend more than a friendly meal to both loved ones and strangers.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Grace and peace to you from God our Father, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven:

who knew you and chose you before the world began;

who loves you so much that he calls you his own children;

who has brought you from darkness into light and filled you with his glorious power;

who has prepared an inheritance for you that will never spoil or fade;

who encourages and strengthens you in every good deed and word;

who comforts you in your troubles so that you can comfort others.

All: **This is our God,
the ultimate source of all things,
and the One for whom we live.
Let's worship God together!**

From "Call to Worship for Thanksgiving," by Christine Longhurst. Available [here](#).

PROCESSION

Welcome the Healer

While singing, have worshipers deliver canned goods or other necessities to stations located around the worship space. Designated assistants will build pyramids and other visuals out of these goods to heighten awareness of our giving today.

WELCOME

Say "hi" to other worshipers and welcome one another in the name of Jesus Christ. On this day, of all days, this practice should not be eliminated.

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 112
Romans 15:4-13

SONGS OF WORSHIP

All I Have is Yours, from *Before the Throne*, by Sojourn
10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord), by Matt Redman and
Jonas Myrin

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 14:1, 7-14
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

SILENCE FOR REFLECTION

Provide time for worshipers to reflect on the weight of God's word for us today. This is a good time to display images as prompts. Schmalz's "Angels Unawares" is a provocative image. You might include a description of the image to guide reflection.

TESTIMONY ON HOSPITALITY

Invite a worshiper to share a story of a time when they felt particularly welcome among God's people. How might this story encourage others to consider how they might be welcomed guests and warm hosts among the people of God?

SONG OF HOSPITALITY

All are Welcome, by Marty Haugen

MESSAGE

"Entertaining Angels and Aliens Alike"

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

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Leader: God, we are aliens and sojourners in this world, but you invite us to be your guests.
 You lavishly offer us your hospitality and lovingly welcome us into your family, You invite us to share in the abundance of your kingdom. God, you have shown us that providing hospitality to strangers opens a doorway into the Kingdom of God. Remind us that when we offer hospitality to others, we are receiving Christ into our midst and so fulfilling the law of love.

All: We open our hearts to embrace the stranger, the friend, the rich, and the poor. We open our lives to offer a generous heart toward all.

*Adapted from A Litany of Hospitality, by Christine Sine.
 Available [here](#).*

CLOSING SONG

Doxology, by David Crowder Band

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Life and Ministry of our Church

BENEDICTION

Leader: Maybe in this there is a glimpse of the kingdom
 a foretaste
 a hint
 a promise.

Let it hold you and let it send you
 so you will never be at peace
 until all are fed
 until all know home
 until all are free
 until justice is done
 until peace is the way
 until grace is the law
 until love is the rule
 until God's realm comes
 until God's realm comes
 until God's realm comes....

*By Cheryl Lawrie, "A Glimpse of the Kingdom."
 Available [here](#).*

SENT OUT TO SERVE

Practice hospitality with a community meal following the worship gathering. Encourage worshipers to sit at tables with both strangers and friends.

A Collect for Thanksgiving

Making Space for Divine Hospitality

Most gracious and welcoming God, the One who comes to us as a neighbor and a stranger, an immigrant and a brother: You are a God of hospitality. No one measures up to your openhearted spirit. You warmly invite all to come to you, creating space for us in your home, at your table, and in your loving arms. You draw out our particular stories while revealing ways in which each one is knitted together in a community called to love, serve, and hope.

Help us, God of love, when it is difficult to reflect your divine hospitality. Give us eyes to see new possibilities in difficult relationships. Make our hearts big enough to make room for someone else—especially the “someone” the world designates as stranger, as alien, as “not one of us,” and even as enemy.

For we know that when we learn to make a way for all to be welcome—whoever they are, wherever they are, however they are—we catch a glimpse of your kingdom. For in welcoming angels and aliens alike, we meet you there, ever calling us into a life of transforming love.

We pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, who, in the power of your Spirit, opened doors and broke barriers so that all may experience your grace. Thanks be to God! Amen.