

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](#).)