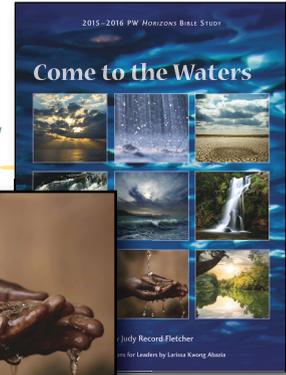


Joyously Giving and Receiving Hospitality

BY IRENE PAK

For use with Lesson Eight of the
2015–2016 PW/*Horizons* Bible study,
Come to the Waters by Judy Record Fletcher



Scripture: John 4:1–30, 39–42; Acts 2:44–47

When I think of the word hospitality, I automatically think about food and eating. Meals and hospitality have gone hand in hand my entire life. Growing up in a Korean home, eating together was the definition of hospitality. I learned the art of sharing, serving and presenting colorful food to guests through the meals my mom and dad would prepare for company. It was, and continues to be, such a joy for them, I learned that hospitality is connected with joy.

The first time I connected hospitality with compassion was on a trip to the Philippines. I was part of a delegation learning about the issues the country faces, especially around poverty. On one of the days, we had an immersion experience with a community living in a large landfill. We prepared a large pot of rice and lots of chicken and shared it with the community. Then each of the delegation members went to the home she or he had been assigned to for the night.

Spending the night in the landfill community was overwhelming, initially. All of our senses were engaged. After a while, though, that faded into the smiles of a people happy to welcome us to their homes. We ate, sang and laughed together. Even when language was a barrier, many things were communicated and shared.

Two girls, who looked no older than 10 years old, but apparently were in their mid-teens, guided me to my shelter for the night. It was a shack made of wood and other pieces found in the landfill. There was a battery-operated lamp glowing inside. As I followed the girls, they gestured for me to wait at the entrance. What they did next astounded me. They used a makeshift broom to sweep the floor, then laid a blanket on the wooden floor. They gestured me in to sit.

This show of hospitality should not have surprised me as much as it did. I was part of a beautiful exchange between people who lived worlds apart. They extended grace and compassion toward me when I was far from home. I learned that day that hospitality and compassion is always an exchange. We did not just bring food; we ate together. Rather than leaving after the community meal, we gave the opportunity for others to welcome us to their homes. We all gave and all received.

In Lesson Eight, Judy Fletcher discusses the hospitality seen in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Judy mentions that the Samaritan seems taken aback by Jesus' offering her living water. The woman thought of living water as coming from a river or a lake—water that flows, not water from a well.

When have you rejected the living waters of hospitality and compassion because it was not “supposed” to come from a certain source?

When have you received the living water of hospitality and compassion?

When have you received it from a place you did not expect?

I think the reason hospitality is so often connected with food and meals is because there is an essential exchange between parties, connecting over shared time and space, fulfilling a basic need. We sit next to one another, look at each other, and enjoy together. And the extension and connections that follow the meal can reach far and beyond that space.

Just as much as we are willing and asked to give these things, may we also be willing to receive them in unexpected places—whether by a well, in a landfill or around your home table.

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