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Growth. Each week in February I'm looking at a different aspect of growth. Growth, and the tree this week, is bigger than the tree last week.

Growth. In September last year I gave out sunflower seeds and invited people to plant them as a sign of spring hope.

Carolyn and Matthew Currie popped around on Friday night with this photo. Their sunflower seed. 3.6 metres high.



Measured by Matthew on a ladder with a tape measure. Growth, from sunflower seed in September, To 3.6 metre high plant in February. That's one sort of growth.

This week I want to look at growth through hospitality. How to grow in loving our neighbour as we love ourself?

But first a story. Jason King, for his 30th birthday, had a pig on a spit. 4 hours of slow roasting. 4 hours of anticipation, gathering with friends, slowly preparing for this great feast of roast pork.

Jason's house had a limited garden area, So the only space to put the pig on the spit was in the backyard. It's a narrow backyard, and the house next door, Two story, with balcony, opens onto Jason's backyard. So for 4 hours, Jason's neighbour also got to smell this slowly roasting pig on a spit.

Jason's neighbour is Moslem. And Jason's birthday fell during the month of Ramadan. When Moslems fast, go all day with food.

Growth through hospitality? How do we grow in loving our neighbours?

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Read the gospels, and Jesus did a lot of growing through hospitality.

Time and again, in the gospels, we find Jesus around food, Time and again, we find Jesus challenging to grow in loving their neighbour, to grow through hospitality.

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Luke 5:27-31: Jesus says, Follow me to a man named Levi, and then sits around Levi's table.

Jesus eats around Levi's table. Probably, not roast pork. Perhaps Levi's special Jewish spicy bean casserole

And some visitors, who are religious folk, are shocked that Jesus would eat, That Jesus would be hospitable with Levi. And to them Jesus says; People who are well do not need a doctor. But only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people to repent, but outcasts.

So around Jesus and hospitality, two questions emerge;
Levi, will you grow in hospitality?

Levi ... will you follow Jesus and let him sit around your table eating your special Jewish spicy bean casserole?

And the question for religious people... Will you grow in hospitality, will you let Jesus sit with people outside your boxes of respectable people? Will you let Jesus offer space for new neighbours?

Two questions that challenge us to grow in hospitality?

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Or take Luke 7:36-50

Jesus goes, not to a "unrespectable person's house" but to a religious person's house. So again, Jesus is showing a growth in hospitality, an ability to eat with people whether they are considered unrespectable, or whether they are considered religious.

Jesus eats around this religious. Definitely not roast pork. Perhaps stuffed Jewish quail, marinated in saffron sauce.

And a woman, A woman that all the locals know leads a sinful life arrives.

And she perfumes Jesus feet, And she sheds tears. And she strokes Jesus feet with her hair. Hmmm, whisper the locals, wonder how she knows Jesus?

And Jesus says; Your sins are forgiven. And again; Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

And again around Jesus and hospitality, two questions emerge; Will the woman accept Jesus forgiveness? Will she go to live in peace? Will she grow through the hospitality offered by Jesus?

And a question for the religious right, for the locals gathered to eat, When they see this local woman tomorrow,

Will they see forgiveness, peace, a new start? Will they accept this woman as radically forgiven?

Will they grow through the hospitality of Jesus?

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We could go on through Luke. In fact, I'd love to write a book called "hospitality with Jesus:" perhaps subtitled the Jewish Naked Chef" – although people from the Christchurch Catholic Cathedral might protest the subtitle.

Hospitality with Jesus. I mean, in Luke 6:1-5 the disciples eat corn on a holy day.

Fresh corn, roasted and served with mustard infused butter

In Luke 9, Jesus feeds the 5000; Fish, pan fried in dill, with baked Jewish bread

In Luke 12, Jesus tells the story of a person who although rich, spends his whole life planning for yet more material goods

Probably deserves to be offered deep fried locust in minted yoghurt dip

In Luke 15, Parable of the Great Banquet; A fatted calf marinated in wild hillside herbs,

In Luke 19, Jesus is invited to Zaccheus house to eat; So why not an entrée of roasted Chick peas

In Luke 22, the Last Supper; Served with Jewish bread.

Do you get the idea; Time and again, in the gospels, we find Jesus in ministry around food, Growing through hospitality.

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And then there's the Luke 24, the Road to Emmaus. And the disciples sit beside Jesus, who takes bread, says a blessing, breaks the bread and gives it to them.

And in that simple act, of eating, of sharing food, In the hospitality, the welcoming a stranger, Jesus is recognized.

That's growth through hospitality. That around food, eating, with friends, we find Jesus. And so in the 14th century, a painter, called Diego Velazquez, Painted The Kitchen Maid at Emmaus. In the foreground is a kitchen maid, preparing dinner. In the background are the disciples, at table, sharing food, eating, recognizing Jesus. And notice the maid. She's stopped. And notice her head. It's slightly turned. She's listening. She's being drawn back in toward the Jesus table.

Possibly Jesus has just said the blessing, broken the bread and given it to the disciples. And the kitchen maid is being drawn into the hospitality, Drawn into that recognizing of Jesus.

So again, around Jesus and hospitality, with food at Emmaus, two questions emerge. How will the maid respond?

Something about Jesus has caught her attention. Will she carry on with her life, the domestic duties and then knocking off for the day?

Or will she pursue Jesus? Perhaps that's you here today. Something about Jesus has been catching your attention. And you need to decide whether to take the next step in pursuing Jesus, You need to decide to go and sit down at the table with Jesus and Jesus friends, and ask the questions that are inside you, Because that would be growth through hospitality.

The second question is, will Jesus friends make room for the Kitchen Maid at the table? Will they move over, find her a seat, let her sit with them?

Or will they send her back to the kitchen? Perhaps that you here today. That you're a disciple, already around table with Jesus.

That you're already religious. Will you make room for the kitchen maid? Move over for those who you deem "unrespectable?"

Offer a seat to new people who find forgiveness in Jesus?

Because that would be growth through hospitality. All throughout Luke, Jesus is offering growth through hospitality.

And those two questions keep being repeated; To those who feel they are deemed "unrespectable", to those who are looking for forgiveness and peace, to those who with heads turned have noticed Jesus for the first time.

... Will you grow through hospitality?

To those already at table, to those who need to accept different people and embrace change in people,

who need to move over and make room, and welcome new people?

Will you share your food, your resources, your pastor?

.... Will you grow through hospitality?

As we prayed last week; PPT prayer

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In closing, let me make one practical suggestion. Let me suggest a spiritual discipline of growth through hospitality.

Every fortnight invite your neighbour over. Simply to practice the discipline of hospitality, of making room at your table.

Let me tell you what will probably happen. You'll feel very pleased with yourself for a few times. And then an old friend will want to catch, or Steve will schedule a church meeting.

And you'll be torn. And at this point the spiritual discipline of growth through hospitality will kick in. A chance to sift your priorities. To consider how we allocate our time.

This perhaps, is where growth coaching comes into play. Perhaps you'll be nervous about inviting over your neighbour, So the growth coach offers encouragement. Perhaps you might not know what to say, So the growth coach helps you access conversational resources

Perhaps when your torn by priorities, the growth coach will hold you accountable and help you process before God how you'll grow through hospitality.

I have offered 3 stories of growth through hospitality around the table of Jesus. Three stories that ask the same 2 questions; Will we sit? Will we make room? Because that would be growth through hospitality?

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