



God on Broadway

Week 2: Beauty and the Beast

Brian Mattson - 01/18/2026

Off the top, I want to be honest with you all. Yes, I cheated. I know the song *Be Our Guest* is originally from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, but the animated classic was almost immediately made into a Broadway musical. Plus, are you really that much of a purist? Some sort of Broadway Pharisee? Also, who could really be that upset with watching Derrick King perform an iconic song with the help of a lively supporting cast? You didn't even have to pay to see it! So let's all just be thankful and go on with the day. Sometimes it's just great to have a special musical offering and that's that.

Do you remember the last time you felt special? I mean truly special. I'm not talking about the last time someone said you did a good job at school or you turned in a really solid presentation at work. I want you to look back and remember a time when people went out of their way to make you feel like you were the most important person in the world at that moment. What did it feel like? What made it memorable? How did you leave the interaction?

I'm lucky to have, who I consider, the best teacher when it comes to understanding the world of making people feel special—making people feel seen and valued. My wife. Jessica has a superpower when it comes to this subject. When she wants someone to feel loved and cared for, she makes them feel special. Whether that's at a lunch or a birthday party or when giving gifts, she goes the extra mile. It's not thrown together at the last

minute—although she is really good at that too. She makes a plan. She thinks about the individual, their likes and dislikes, preferences and passions, and then she goes on the hunt.

She spends months shopping for Christmas and birthday presents for our kids. She asks questions. She develops a theme. She curates a menu. And the presents, my goodness, they look like they were wrapped by the person who invented wrapping. Bows and ribbons. Paper and twine. Sometimes there are even little trinkets tied into the ribbons. I'm always amazed.

And then there are the decorations. Over several hours or days, our house gets transformed into an entirely new location. During the Christmas season, people are welcomed into a winter wonderland. At our kids' birthdays, we've traveled to the world of Encanto, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, and two years in a row now, Dorothy has requested sparkles and unicorns. And by gosh, our kitchen has been the epicenter of sparkles and unicorns.

Had I never met her, I may have thought this all frivolous. These parties and seasons, dinners and occasions, are all temporary, so why go through the trouble of making them special? I may have operated more like Dwight and Jim from The Office when they were in charge of office parties.

OFFICE CLIP

I, like Dwight and Jim, didn't quite have a grasp on how to make people feel special. I've gotten much better after years of living with a patient teacher, but I'm still learning. And making people feel special is a skill that we can practice. All of us, with enough training and repetition, can become skilled practitioners in the art of hospitality.

I mentioned this at the town hall after worship last Sunday, but hospitality is one of the main areas we are going to focus on in 2026. And not just bare-minimum hospitality. Radical hospitality. Because I've learned something by watching and learning from my wife's mastery of radical hospitality. It's that those temporary moments or events become lasting

memories. When we brush up against radical hospitality it sticks with us. My kids can tell you the theme of their birthday parties or explain details about how we decorated for Christmas because it was special. It meant something to them. It stuck out and stuck with them. And that's one of our goals this year. To lean into hospitality here at The Downtown Church.

It's not that we aren't hospitable here. We are! But what would it look like if we got better? What does it look like to do more? How can we emulate God's hospitality? Yes, God shows radical hospitality and God calls us to be radically hospitable too. We are made in God's likeness, after all. We have the *Imago Dei*—the image of God—baked right into our DNA. So how can we emulate the virtue of hospitality we see in scripture, and hear about from the dishes, pots, and pans in *Beauty and the Beast*? Let's dig in.

From the very beginning—rather, I should say, “in the beginning”—God shows hospitality. The penultimate act in the first creation story is the genesis of humankind on the sixth day. It's the final act of bringing about life to the created order before God sets aside rest on the Sabbath.

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to

every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

- Genesis 1:26-31 NRSV

The creation of humanity wasn't an afterthought. Everything was put in place to meet our needs, to give us food and shelter. We were set up for success from the beginning. And not only were we set up for success, but we were set apart. Out of everything in the creation story, humankind is the only thing made in the image of God. The rest of the natural world calls out in praise to the creator, but we are called to be just like the creator. And one of those ways is to be practitioners of radical hospitality.

This is a virtue that is threaded through scripture, both quietly and with shouts. Hospitality is lifted up in stories like Abraham welcoming three strangers with a place to rest, water to wash, and a generous meal. For the wandering Israelites, hospitality is part of their holiness code, as found in Leviticus 19.

“When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don't take advantage of him. Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. I am God, your God.”

- Leviticus 19:33-34 MSG

That verse is a little on-the-nose in this news cycle, isn't it? I can't take that line out of the Bible if it makes you feel uncomfortable, but I promise you there are plenty of other parts of scripture that make me feel uncomfortable as well. Regardless, we are called to this sort of behavior. As my study bible

puts it, “ ‘Holiness is understood as more than just ethical excellence; it is behavior that imitates God’s behavior.’ ”

Into the New Testament and the early Church, hospitality is repeatedly modeled and lifted up as an example for us to follow today. Jesus didn’t just teach about it in parables like The Good Samaritan. He initiated it by inviting Zacchaeus to a meal and washing the feet of his disciples. And just in these two quick examples, we see that Jesus considers hospitality essential for both people outside of our communities and those who are already part of the family.

And even after Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, the early Church intentionally begins as a community where things are shared. The food, the struggles, and the burdens. And that’s because everyone is related. Kinfolk. Those first Christian communities were basically like Olive Garden—when you’re here, you’re family.

At the heart of all this hospitality talk is another virtue of Christianity. A hallmark of what Christians are supposed to embody—selflessness. Because really, hospitality is the practice of seeing the needs of other people and putting them before yours. Hospitality, radical hospitality, is a little bit of risk-taking mixed with boundary-crossing, plus a sprinkle of cheer for good measure. Scripture shows examples of these. Scripture also lifts up warnings about those who fail to show hospitality to others. Disney (and Broadway) do too.

That’s the plight of the Beast. If you recall the opening of the story, the young prince in the great castle was interrupted by an old woman looking for a place to stay warm on a winter’s night. All she could offer in return was a rose. The prince scoffed at her offer and appearance then turned her away. It just so happened she was actually a “beautiful enchantress” who then cursed the prince to live out his days in the monstrous form of the beast until he

learned to truly love and be loved in return. The others in the castle shared his curse, but they had not forgotten what hospitality looked like.

And when Belle comes to the castle, Lumiere and the kitchen staff show what radical hospitality looks like. It's service with a smile. It's food and rest and dry clothes. It's anticipating another's needs. It's selflessness. It's one of the catchiest songs in the entire catalog of Disney. So what can we learn today from these pots, pans, platters, and cups? How does The Downtown Church become a place of radical hospitality in 2026?

The first thing we can do is recognize that there is always room for improvement, so let's at least be willing to start the dialogue. Second, there are easy-wins and low-hanging fruit that we are already planning: a proper parking lot sign with clear communication, fixing some peeling paint, and adding a few more donut holes to the Sunday order. And third, we need to remember the *why* behind what we do on Sundays. To that end, we are going to hold a breakfast celebration and training opportunity for our hospitality teams: the greeters, coffee and conversation teams, and others. We recognize that our volunteers are doing an amazing job of creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. So how do we take the next step? Where can we improve? What should we add or remove? There are so many good questions and ideas that will start flowing if we are open to the discussion around improving the Sunday morning experience for our guests and visitors.

The final thing for all of us to remember is that radical hospitality isn't just something we do on Sunday mornings. It's our cultural identity. It's something that we take with us everywhere we go. It marks us as a people set apart. Holy. And not in some sort of self-righteous way. It's not a feather in our cap to boast about. Rather, it's making sure there's always water in our bowls to wash the feet of those who are weary. An ear to listen to those who are downtrodden. There's a warmth to our interactions.

When we think about radical hospitality, we have to think bigger than Sunday morning. There's an entire world out there desperate to be seen and known. I hope we can get even better at it on Sundays, but I hope more than that, people see it in your words and actions Monday through Saturday and want to find out where you get recharged each week. And sometimes, when you're exhausted and worn slick, I hope you crawl into church on a Sunday morning and the people here remind you that God is the inventor of hospitality. Jesus is our model of hospitality. And when you find your strength again, you, too, are just as capable. Near the end of Romans, Paul lays out a beautiful vision of radical hospitality.

Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"

That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it. Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus! So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it!

- Romans 15:1-7 MSG

Now you do it. And not just on Sunday. But if you don't feel like you are doing a good job serving, where might you find a place? There are always needs here, but I can point you in a hundred different directions to get started in the community. Or maybe you feel too tired or weak to serve. That's okay. You are in the right place. There are people who are strong and able here who can help you heal. And in short order you may find yourself ready to serve again. A servant of love in this world. As Lumiere says, "Life is so unnerving for a servant who's not serving."

The song *Be Our Guest* is a great reminder of what radical hospitality looks like. It's anticipatory. It provides real benefits like food, shelter, and rest. It's invitational to everyone, especially those outside of one particular community. And as we sing our last song, I hope you take the idea of radical hospitality with you this week and into 2026, as we ask not, "Who *deserves* a seat?", but rather, "Who's *missing* from our table?" That's kind of what Jesus did. He invited outsiders to share meals. The sinners, tax collectors, or *worse* who were kept outside by the religious elite. That's the amazing way Jesus made people feel special. That's the secret to God's love. It's not its exclusive nature. There are always more seats for more people.