

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM

An Invitation from God

Steve Matthews

On a spring day in Washington, D.C., I was enjoying the sights with my niece and nephew. This was their first trip to our nation's capital, and we found much to see and do in the big city. But walking the streets of a city as diverse as D.C. can create a sense of the strange, especially for those who come from a small town.

One memory stands out to me: As we walked down a side street by the National Gallery of Art, we passed a man lying on a grate, huddled under a blanket. The inquisitive look on my nephew's face was soon followed by a question: "Why is that man lying there?" I explained that he was probably homeless and that the warm air coming out of the grate must feel good on a cool day. I realized that this may have been the first homeless person my nephew had ever encountered, and I'm sure that the experience was strange. Yet each question he asked and each feeble answer I provided seemed to evoke more compassionate curiosity from my nephew.

Compassionate curiosity. I wonder how our experience of encountering "the strange" might be different if we approached new people and experiences with compassionate curiosity instead of fear, judgment, or labeling. Judgment and curiosity do not easily coexist, so imposing labels on new or strange encounters can quickly shut down our ability to see the potential opportunity. If we can't see it and open up to it, how can we welcome it with integrity? Perhaps "the strange" is an invitation from God.

In scripture, Jesus repeatedly engages with and welcomes people whom others perceive as strange. At times, he too is considered strange. Even so, he persists for the sake of love. In Matthew 8 Jesus heals the servant of a centurion, a member of the Roman occupying force. In effect, Jesus performs a miracle for the "enemy." In this story, as in many others, Jesus shows compassion, hospitality, and healing in ways his world perceived as strange.

Dig Deeper

Give yourself a five-minute break. Close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. In the quiet, think about your own life. What has happened recently that you might consider strange? Perhaps you had a surprising reaction to a conversation, or maybe a budding dream or passion is puzzling to you. Rather than labeling it as "strange," approach this experience with a sense of curiosity. What does it teach you about yourself? about God? Can you welcome this strange and wondrous new awareness of yourself?

Now recall a recent encounter with a person that you might label as strange. Allow yourself to become compassionately curious about this person. Do you begin to sense a new perspective? Is it possible to welcome the strange in this encounter?

Spend a few minutes praying with compassionate curiosity about what God might be up to in the strange and new that you see in yourself and in another. Be open to whatever invitation God may be extending to you.

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