

Trinity XI 2019 (Year C P17 OT22)

Have you ever attended a party of some kind; dinner or otherwise, where one of the guests said something unfortunate that managed to spoil the harmony of the occasion? Think about it – I am sure we have all been there! I wonder if the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine regretted it afterwards.

One of the problems of our march through this year of Luke is that the Sunday Gospel readings don't allow us to appreciate the full flavour of the Gospel writer's gift of including vivid imagery. As the theologian Robert Karris comments, we tend to be served small bites as we journey through the Gospel, but whole slices are left out! So if you want to get the full flavour of today's account, it is as well to read the following nine verses. Jesus, in response to a rather smug statement by a fellow guest, *'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!'* gives an even more radical take on what we heard today. It is worth exploring when you have a Bible to hand at home.

One of the most notable devices Luke uses is that of food. Much of the teaching in the Gospel takes place around the table, and if you were to explore the Gospel with this in mind, you would be surprised at the way in which it provides a backbone to much of the action or the imagery used. Today's passage causes us to consider two things: the vision of a divine banquet to which all are called, and secondly the example of divine hospitality – the example of which is a call to each of us in our Christian discipleship. This is no ordinary hospitality. In this little parable Jesus talks of social conventions upside-down.

We can understand from this passage the rigid hierarchy of position whilst eating together, particularly at formal meals like banquets and wedding feasts. People knew that this positioning was all to do with honour and shame. You would seat according to your social status, but if, for instance, a more important guest arrived late, you would all have to shuffle around until order was restored. Heaven forbid that you had to take the lowest place in front of all the guests! It was something which would mark you within everyday life in your community. However, Luke is always a keen observer of the response of people to the ministry of Jesus and the challenges he poses. Ultimately, the Lord talks of the kingdom in terms of the transformation of our whole outlook and journey through life – a turning upside-down of convention. This manifesto is set out at the start of the Gospel in the words of the Magnificat when Mary says,

'He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

A kingdom life means acknowledging our unity with all people no matter who they are. We are called to respond to those at the bottom of the pile as if they were at the top. Indeed one of the great gifts of our Faith to humanity is this sense that we are all equal in the eyes of God. When Mary talks of the rich being sent empty away, this points to the question of

intent rather than that of our bank balance. We are called to display the hospitality of God within our lives. One of the most talented of Scottish writers and theologians of the 19th century, George MacDonald, wrote that, *'It is a common feeling that only the well-to-do have a right to be hospitable. The ideal flower of hospitality is almost unknown to the rich; it can hardly be grown **save** in the gardens of the poor; it is one of their beatitudes.'* – a lovely and a pertinent way of reinforcing the Lord's call to hospitality.

Michael, the son of dear friends of mine, was transformed on a trip as a young teenager to Africa where he thought that he would be distributing *largesse* to those he was spending time amongst. He was himself transformed at the joyful sharing of the very little they had by the people he shared time with.

The imagery of the divine banquet is ultimately about the kingdom life held out to each of us. Jesus issues the invitations to the greatest of feast – the wedding feast– at which he is the bridegroom and the Church the bride. There are no exclusions if we appreciate our call to reveal the kingdom in the very way in which we live our lives displaying an equality of love. In demonstrating this, we ourselves might be surprised, *'for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.'*

The foretaste of the divine banquet is something we celebrate every time we gather around the table of the Lord. This central and fullest act of Christian worship speaks, says Clement of Alexandria as *'the holy agape – the sublime and saving creation of the Lord, a banquet of the Word, and this agape or love 'bears all things, endures all things, hopes all things.'*

Experiencing as we do currently the utterly baleful state of national and international politics, Jesus through word and deed offers the truest understanding of service in turning the concept of power on its head through self-giving love. Each of us has the privilege to make this known to others so that they too can share in the life of the One who is the Living Bread, the True Vine, and in so doing, find their true selves.



The Rich Man and Lazarus – Edward Knippers (b. 1946)

Proverbs 25: 6-7

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great;
for it is better to be told, 'Come up here',
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.
What your eyes have seen.

Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.^[a] ⁴ Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' ⁶ So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?'

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Luke 14: 1, 7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. ⁸ 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.

¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

¹² He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'