

Hospitality

From Jo's sermon on 1st September, based on Luke 14; 1, 7-14

In many ways we were brought up to talk about gentle Jesus meek and mild but often we can find ourselves shocked by the real Jesus of the Gospels, who is very challenging.

In this Gospel passage Jesus challenges both his host about his choice of guests – and the guests about their presumptions! You might even paraphrase it 'by inviting your friends and family and neighbours who are in your social class you have made sure that you have lost nothing and spent nothing and therefore risked nothing and actually done nothing that qualifies you as a host in the spiritual sense of the word or as it should be understood in biblical terms'. You have invited only people who can return the gesture of inviting you back. Yes, this is a nice social event but is not real hospitality.

Biblical hospitality is about taking a risk by inviting strangers and those who you do not know from other places, "aliens", into your house and into your household. Biblical hospitality is rooted in the Hebrew awareness that we are all strangers here on this earth and the Shema, the daily prayer for Jews said each morning, begins with the words, 'a wandering Aramean was my Father' recalling how Abraham and Sarah were called to wander the earth and look for the promised land. Abraham and Sarah depended on hospitality they received as strangers on their travels and in turn were to give to others hospitality when they pitched their tents.

So who are the strangers, the aliens in our midst that God wants us to be mindful of and invite? According to Jesus they are the poor and those in most need. Jesus has offended both his host and the other guests! And perhaps us too. These are the people who cannot repay you, the ritually unclean if you had some life limiting health problem. You might contaminate yourself by inviting such people.

So who has God asked us to invite? Who are the wandering Arameans? If we are all

strangers here on earth, we are called upon to offer hospitality on our life pilgrimage, our spiritual journey looking for that promised land of God's kingdom.

We are all in need of hospitality if we are strangers in this land. Jesus is the true host, the perfect and loving welcomer. We as the church, as we seek to be Christ in the world, should be ready to exercise hospitality. The most important and sacred act that we do in church is the re-enactment of a meal, at which Jesus is and was the host. The bread blessed at communion is also called the host.

The word host and its many meanings comes from the Latin, *Hostis*, a Latin root word that means at its essence stranger, someone from a different place, land

Our English words that come from this are all about our treatment of the stranger. A hospital is a place for strangers to stay who are sick, a Hospice is a guest room for a stranger at the end of their journey. A host, a person who receives a stranger. And hostile means that the stranger remains seen as an enemy, no bridges have been built or relationships forged. Host is bread that one gives to a stranger. Hospitality, welcoming the stranger.

All these meanings are behind our communion, as we respond to the invitation, we come as someone at the upper room, watching, and Jesus looks up and bids us welcome, leaving behind our pew and power or position. We kneel and hold out our hands, relaxing our grip and - like a child - willing to receive.

We come and God gives us the bread of life, it changes us from strangers to brothers and sisters in God's family, changing us from pilgrims to hosts and we return into our lives, to the world around us, to share the good news with others, who like us are in need of the love of Jesus.
Amen.