

Sermon - Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Luke 14:1.7-14 & Hebrews13:1-8. 15-16

Thomas Hardy, the Author, was the sort of writer that any newspaper of his day would have been glad to accept anything he submitted for publication, and pay handsomely for the privilege, but now and then he would submit a poem, and include a stamped addressed envelope for the return of the manuscript should it be rejected.

What a wonderful example of humility! And that's a running theme through this passage from Luke today.

When Jesus told this story of the wedding feast, he wasn't giving practical advice for social occasions, although there is a lot of common sense in that, if unsure, it's always better to choose a seat at a lower table and be invited up to the top one, than to be asked quietly to move because you're a little above your station.

So what's Jesus trying to say, and how might it affect us today?

Jesus, normally so merciful and compassionate, seems to be easily upset by self-centeredness and hypocrisy.

We are living in a world that values competition and success, occupying the 'place of honour', above all else, where there is little space for the weak and for those who are unable to push themselves forward. We live in a world that has many honours lists, where positions of importance can be sought and cherished – especially true at right now as we wait in Great Britain for a new Prime minister in a very uncertain time in our lives.

Try to listen to Jesus' telling us that all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

It's actually a warning against pride and arrogance, pushing yourself forward in the sight of God. In Jesus' day it was easy for those who were educated, maybe in the law, to think of themselves as superior to the poor and uneducated.

Is this true now? Do we still look down on lesser mortals – do we treat everybody equally? "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others" Remember this quotation from George Orwell's novel 'Animal Farm'? Some things never change.

Later, but still in Luke's life time there would be lots of non-Jews who had become Christians – think of it as walking into a dinner party prepared by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We know that many Jewish Christians found this very difficult to accept (that God invited outsiders to the party) and then openly, or inwardly disapproved.

They thought they were the ones invited invited to sit at the top table, and hadn't bargained on Jesus turning the tables (so to speak) on them. Pride and arrogance are dreadful things when they get in the way of relationships.

What did we learn from the passage in Hebrews about the Marks of a Christian? It involved that thing called brotherly love, and to that it added hospitality! It had nothing to do with pride or arrogance but an outward show of love and grace - Opportunities which have been given to us. Only in the last few days after our service on Wednesday we had a visit from a young woman called Oksana - a Ukrainian refugee. She and her and her two children are living locally with a family in Bromsgrove. She came in to ask if she could light a candle in our church to remember her husband and her wider family still in the Ukraine. We welcomed her and she shared a cup of Coffee with us before going into church to light her candle and pray.

This carries over into all aspects of our lives, and connects back to the Hebrews reading about being content with what we have, and have been given, whether its wealth or a particular talent or ability. Because if we are, then it allows space for God to work with us and bless us, and others, further.

Another example, recently a doctor on the radio talked about an inner conviction that rather than sit in his posh private clinic in Sloan Square in London, he should be working 22 hour shifts by day in the terrible refugee camps in Darfur. He couldn't explain why, and hated it when people praised him for his efforts.- I think that's what Jesus means by giving.

In our daily lives, if we practice hospitality, give generously of that which we have, demonstrate brotherly or sisterly love to others, and are content with that which God has given us, then not only will others take notice and want to know what it is that makes the difference in our lives, but we will also bring a smile to the face of God.

Amen.

Let us pray-

Jesus, teach us to give  
and not to count the cost,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to work and not to ask for any reward  
except the reward of knowing  
that we are doing your will. Amen