

Jesus' party

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor

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Proverbs 25:6-7, Psalm 112, Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16, Luke 14:1 (2-6) 7-14

In today's gospel Jesus is invited to a dinner party. Did you know the Gospel of Luke has more meal-time scenes than all the others? His vision of Christian life is like one big party. Scene after scene has people gathering with Jesus, sharing a meal, asking questions, being challenged and finding answers. This happens in Emmaus, in an upper room, or the fields along the road (plucking the heads of grain); in the home of Levi the despised tax collector, Simon the Pharisee here, another, an unnamed leader of the Pharisees who offers Jesus hospitality for the Sabbath dinner.

So Jesus again is eating at the home of one of the leaders of the community. It would be like you or me eating at the house of the Bishop. So Jesus goes to this party and everyone is watching him very closely. The way they are watching is to test him. You know it is like when you get dressed up to eat at a very nice restaurant and you want to be sure you do all the right things—use the right knife and fork, butter plate and all that? The people watching Jesus were very curious about what he would do at this party, whether he would follow the rules or break them—again. Back in Jesus' day, whom you ate with and what place they had at the table was very, very important. So all eyes are on Jesus.

Jesus notices that people are very carefully choosing the best places to sit. Has anyone ever done that? Have you turned up at a party or function and positioned yourself so you are in front of the best food, the most interesting people and the really important person? Who has ever gone to a wedding reception curious as to where you have been seated and disappointed you were not more special to the bride and groom? I remember going to a birthday party as a little girl and being so sad I wasn't sitting next to the special birthday person. In our gospel story Jesus is noticing that the guests are trying to get the best seats so they are close to the special and important people. We do that don't we? We like to rub shoulders with the witty, the funny, the clever, the powerful, the beautiful, the rich and the famous—the important people.

I recently went to a dinner party, complete with silver service, attended by three bishops, three university professors, a university chancellor and a Supreme Court judge. I couldn't make up my mind where to sit or what was appropriate! There were so many important people there I was confused! The dinner was to say thank you to a retiring professor and I was there in my capacity as a board member of St Mark's Council. There are all sorts of reasons in our day and age why we may end up finding ourselves dining with all sorts of people.

In Jesus' day it was reciprocity that drove the social machine. Reciprocity is when we do something for someone else expecting that we will have something similar done in return—"I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine". So in Jesus' day people invited someone to dinner expecting that they would get something in return—the dinner guest might invite them to their house, they might talk to them in the street and frequent their shops. Reciprocity was how you climbed the social ladder, gained influence and security.

At this dinner party Jesus tells his fellow guests something very different. He tells people to always take the least favoured, the lowest place and he turns reciprocity upside down. He says: don't invite your rich and important friends, brothers or sisters or neighbours. Instead invite all the people who are unimportant and forgotten in the world of reciprocity. The

people who for various reasons cannot do you favour in return. All the people who will never be able to pay you back. Jesus named the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. People like the poor and the disabled, the oppressed, the non-powerful.

So if Jesus was throwing a party, what sort of party would he have? Who would he invite? What would he do at the party?

He welcomed everyone—sinners, sex workers, government bureaucrats, army commanders, farm workers, fisherman, bleeding women, foreigners, strangers, children, beggars, religious leaders, revolutionaries and protesters, ascetics, disabled people, the anxious, the depressed, the manic, the lonely, the rich and the famous. The list goes on.

He didn't just welcome these people. He ate and drank with them, he touched them, he healed them—he joined in! He noticed people who were being left out. He talked with them and if he could help them he did. He didn't mind celebration and joy—he liked it and even changed water into wine to keep things moving along! He took the role of a servant. He tied a towel around his waist and washed his guests' feet. As the guest of honour, he is the one who gets down on the floor and serves his guests.

When we look at Jesus we see what God would do and what God want us to do.

Jesus tells us that God invites everyone to God's party and all are part of God's people. Even the people we may not like or even know, God loves and knows. God wants us to remember that God not only loves us and cares for us but cares for all people no matter who they are, what they look like, or how they act.

Which brings me to the coming federal election. Perhaps you have noticed that I am not very political in my sermons or writing? It is not my business to tell anyone how to live their life, what to believe, how to vote or use my influence to shift peoples political preferences. Who you are, what you believe, what you choose is between you and God. My job is to keep saying—look at Jesus ... come to Christ ... follow him. He is the way, the truth and the life. I trust that the Spirit of Christ will be at work in your soul.

This week I tried to write something for the pew sheet about the election, that would be helpful and encouraging. I even tried to write something about spring and new beginnings. Perhaps you have noticed there is nothing in there? In the end I could not find anything to say. I was silenced in the face of my confusion about what on earth was going on.

Yet today I just have to say something and I feel almost in tears as I say it. The race to the bottom over refugee policy from both major political parties is just plain wrong. The complete lack of debate and serious attention to environmental issues is just plain wrong. The appalling way we are gearing up to treat other human beings in the name of deterrence or protecting our interests is deeply, deeply disturbing. Someone said to me recently, well we could take many more refugees here but we would have to accept a lower standard of living. That's it in a nutshell. That's a way forward. We, I, accept less government handouts and tax breaks, less luxuries, less of everything, less travel and red wine and solitude and space so that some other loved child of God can live and breath in freedom.

So they can have safety and a home, so they can be welcomed to our great big party where we feast like kings and live like queens.

What we are doing now is all about winning seats and holding onto to power. It is scapegoating and violence and injustice. It is cruel and stupid and pointless. It is blind and greedy and fear driven. It will not work. It will effect not just refugees who come by boat but all refugees who are seeking safety. While we are busily stopping the boats, spending millions and energy on a relatively small issue, we will be ignoring all the other ways we

could make a difference. Make no mistake this will not end. Many more millions of people are one the move and will continue to do so for decades to come.

This election I am going to pray. At synod where I will be attending with Robin, Andrea, Peter, Patricia and Ann I will be praying. And I will be trying to make my puny vote count so that no one party can simply ram through these appalling policies. And I will be doing all I can to understand what on earth is going on and how I can be part of a better way.

God in Jesus Christ did not come among us so one group of people could prosper at the expense of others. God did not sacrifice everything so only the rich and powerful would have a seat the heavenly table. Jesus did not rise from the dead so that I could continue to live in blissful blindness about my own culpability in scapegoating, violence and fear mongering. Jesus Christ came that all people, all people, may have life and have it abundantly. So that all people may be reconciled to God and each other. So that all may be welcomed, embraced, healed, loved and known.

Dear God, you love us all and want us all to be part of your party. Help us to remember that you are with us when we feel alone and when we don't. Show us how to invite our friends to be a part of you. In Jesus name, amen.

God is with you always.