

**Sunday 28 August 2022 – Trinity 11**

**Hebrews 13. 1-8, 15-16**

**Luke 14. 1, 7-14**

I am sure that all or many of you offer hospitality to others during the course of any year, or even more frequently. When you are thinking of inviting people and planning it, what thoughts are going through your mind ? Perhaps, like us just after we arrived in Woodbridge, you have a little list of people who have invited you to one thing or another, and you want to reciprocate; or, you have come to know someone as a new acquaintance and want to expand that relationship into friendship. There may be many other motivations for your invitation, including things like wanting to see where other people live and so you are hoping to be invited back at some stage – well, we are all human, aren't we ?

Similarly, when you receive an invitation, what goes through your mind ? This can also reveal many motivations, ranging perhaps from “why on earth are they inviting me, I don't particularly like them” to “oh good, they are such nice people” and everything in between.

Hospitality is at the core of our Gospel reading from Luke this morning, and there is a particular emphasis on humility. Jesus is attending a meal with a group of Pharisees, and danger lurks in the conversation. Some of the guests decide for themselves to sit in the best places, which prompts Jesus to tell them the parable of such people being shown a much less honourable place further down the table, and vice versa of course. In such a situation you would probably wait to be told where to sit, and would sit there even if you would much rather sit next to your special friend. Lo and behold, you may find you are sitting next to the most interesting person in the room ! The author of the Letter to the Hebrews makes the point that in offering hospitality to someone we don't know at all, for whatever reason, we may find ourselves entertaining angels. Remember Abraham

and the strangers who turn out to be messengers from God making far-reaching promises to him. Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who find they have offered hospitality to Jesus himself after the resurrection.

There are other ways of showing hospitality to others, which do not involve sitting at a table for a meal. Last week I was talking here about hospital chaplaincy: in fact all chaplains offer what we call a “hospitality space” to the people they see, a space where they can deposit the things they are worried or concerned about. What is sometimes nothing short of miraculous is that the other person ends up by giving the chaplain much more than the chaplain thinks he or she is giving, which is a very humbling position to be in. But actually we can all, in our daily lives, offer others the same space, say in conversation, and demonstrate that we are interested in or sympathetic to what they have to say, and are prepared to put our own concerns to one side.

Back to Luke and the Sabbath meal Jesus is attending with the Pharisees. Sabbath meals in particular were regarded as taking on the character of anticipations of meals or banquets in the Kingdom, to which we look forward. If, he says, we confine our invitations to our existing good friends or rich neighbours, then we can give ourselves the satisfaction of knowing that our hospitality will be returned. This will represent pride not humility, because such meals are exclusive not reaching out in intention. Real hospitality is given to people who are not in a position to return it, and so those exercising such hospitality will be rewarded, as Jesus puts it, at the “resurrection of the righteous”. In the verse which immediately follows today’s reading, one of the guests exclaims “blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God”, which suggests he thinks he will be one of them. This leads to Jesus telling the parable of the rejected invitation, which is told rather differently in Matthew 22, with all its well-known excuses.

We can but do our best to follow Jesus's example, as well as not neglecting our friends. I'm not free today, by the way, because we're going to a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. Have a happy bank holiday !