

## GOSPEL

## Luke 14.1, 7-14

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour,  
he told them a parable.
- <sup>8</sup> '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;
- <sup>9</sup> 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.
- <sup>10</sup> 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.
- <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled,  
and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'
- <sup>12</sup> 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.
- <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet,  
invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.
- <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you,  
for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

## Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, 28 August 2016

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled,  
and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

*Luke 14:11*

These two little parables of Jesus are not about social etiquette. Rather, they bring us to the very heart of God, and are both comforting and disturbing at one and the same time. Jesus' teaching takes place around a table, where food and drink – the very things we need to live – are served and lives are shared. And in these simple, basic exchanges, the truth about our motivations of each one of us is revealed.

Initially, the first parable appears quite straightforward. It also looks as if it would be very easy to manipulate the rules. If you want the host to honour you, simply sit in the lowest place. You will avoid embarrassment, you will be noticed and the host will move you higher. You can see how false humility could easily be played out. But of course God sees our hearts. Before God, we can be nothing but genuine. We are all God's guests, and none of us deserves to be at God's table. Rather, we depend on grace. It is only when we truly know this that we can grow in genuine humility and delight in being at the table at all, take an equal interest in every other guest and see that the “lowest” place is as honourable as any other.

The second parable imagines that we are the host. Who do we invite to our table? Are we caught in a cycle of wealthy giving and receiving – we must invite the Joneses, as they invited us last month? And of course we must give to those who are worse off than we are and shop for the food bank. These things are good, but Jesus is saying something different. His teaching is not about giving to those who are poor; it's about hospitality – welcoming people into our lives, eating and drinking together rather than doing our duty and walking away. If we are serious about wanting to live kingdom lives, our desire will be to take our place among those who seem to have so little and to open our hearts, not just our wallets. Why - because in the kingdom we are all guests. Each person, poor or wealthy, can be a means of grace to every other. No one is any less to be honoured than anyone else. It's a radical way of looking at a society. No wonder Jesus was unpopular with the wealthy.

It was Henri Nouwen, the priest and theologian and founder of the L'arche Communities who said,

“Our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared.” It indicates how as a Christian we are to live, for we are called to learn the true nature of hospitality: sharing life, opening hearts, eating and drinking together, welcoming the stranger – entertaining angels unawares – following the example of the one who gave his life to us, and welcomed us to sit and eat with him.