



# *Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost*

## *Sermon by Revd Sharmain James*



Sunday 28 August 2022

### READINGS

Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

## *Humility*

Elizabeth Gilbert's book - *Eat, Pray, Love* which is also a movie is the true story of a woman on a personal quest that takes her to Italy, India and Bali – where she eats, prays and find true love. In her travels, she discovers the true pleasure of nourishment by eating in Italy, enjoying pastas and ice cream for four months. She begins her spiritual journey not with strict practices but with consuming big plates of pasta with total enjoyment.

Eating is one of the most human and most necessary activities. We observe that meals are very important in Luke's gospel. Luke's gospel has more mealtime scenes than all the others. For Jesus meals were an important occasion and they were about much more than devouring food. The meal was an occasion for talking and fellowship, and important things were said by Jesus in this public gathering. On the occasion reported in Luke's gospel today, Jesus is invited to dinner with a leader of the Pharisees. We are not surprised that Jesus is dining as a guest of a Pharisee. He has done so previously. But we usually feel tension coming whenever Jesus and the Pharisees get together. The Pharisees may have been the people Jesus had some of his most significant run-ins with.

Jesus wasn't known for his politeness around the dinner table – which often upset the leaders of the day. More than once, he interrupted a meal to heal sick people on the Sabbath. Often, he ate with dirty hands, shared a table with riff-raff. Worst of all — he said things. Blunt, embarrassing things no one cared to hear. Even though they were looking for any irregularities in Jesus' behaviour – Jesus still associated with them, still sat at the table and talked and disputed with them. And he did this even though he knew full well, as Luke reminds us here, that they were closely watching him and all that he did. It is also good for us to watch Jesus closely – because by watching Jesus closely - we can appreciate the love of God and see what God tolerates in us and forgives us for.

In today's passage from Luke's gospel – Jesus had already made a bit of a scene by once again healing on the Sabbath. It is then afterwards that Jesus taught a parable which is part of our Gospel reading today. Jesus played his role as an interested observer. He noticed how guests are manoeuvring for choice seats, the places of honour. At an ancient meal, the table was usually in the shape of a U, and the host sat at the base. The closeness of your place to the middle of the U indicated your importance to the host. We know that Jesus frowned upon people who liked to glorify themselves. This prompted Jesus to say the following: When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. The moral Jesus adds to the story all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted".

This echoes the words of Mary Song of praise to God (Luke 1:52). – He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. Many at the meal might have been expected to be at the head of the table, a position of status and importance. Rather than assume positions of importance Jesus talks about humility and respect for others. Jesus invites his hearers to rethink their places at the table and to imagine new ways of being in relation with those with whom they share a meal. He then turns his attention to the host of the dinner and said:

Instead of inviting those who can invite you back – Jesus tells him to invite those who are different from his usual dinner guest. When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Meals were important for the people of God, but they had deteriorated into prideful practices where prominent people displayed wealth and hungry people went uncared for. The Pharisees - thought they were the ones 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. Many Jews couldn't see their need of God's grace and mercy, because they considered themselves to be chosen already by God to receive all that he had prepared for them by way of blessings, and this extended to thinking that those who were racially outsiders shouldn't receive it anyway.

Today's passage in Hebrews tells us what the marks of a Christian should be ? It involved that thing called brotherly and sisterly love, and to that it added hospitality! It had nothing to do with pride or arrogance but an outward show of love and grace! How do we avoid pride and embrace humility? The writer of Hebrews talks about - being content with what we have, and have been given, whether it's 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. Jesus wanted his followers to copy his example. HE had few possessions, he gave up his authority and became a servant.

### **The humble Gandhi:**

One man who took Jesus seriously was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi acknowledged that he had been much influenced by the Gospels and touched by the life of Christ. As he once remarked, "I might have become a Christian had it not been for Christians!" Gandhi did not lead the masses by standing like a monarch above them but by identifying with them and sharing in their circumstances. He identified himself with the half-naked rural masses by rejecting his attorney's pants and coat and dressing himself with a loincloth and cotton shawl. While the other high caste Indian politicians were not willing to associate themselves with the untouchables, Gandhi chose to live, eat and march with the untouchables, and he gave them a new dignity and a new name. He honoured them by calling them - - the people of God."

If we want to be truly happy, if we wish to be fulfilled and know that our contribution to life is worthwhile, then we have to learn to put others first and be prepared to think less about ourselves. We need to become the guests of God and the hosts of everyone else:

As God's guests in this world, we should act humbly and remember that we are always in the presence of Someone greater than we are. As hosts of God's people, we should offer hospitality to those who cannot reward us.

Surely, we do not have to leave out our friends and families. But neither should we leave out the poor and disabled. We are asked to look upon ourselves as having received everything we are and have, from its true source, God, and to acknowledge Him as the giver of all blessings.

We should choose the lowest place and never think of ourselves as better than anyone else, for all we are is due to God's grace. This is the way to form our hearts in humble gratitude and to live with that peace of heart that only true Christian humility can bring us.