



28<sup>th</sup> August 2022 | 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Pentecost Growth

## *Jesus invites all to His dinner parties*

As I was looking at the readings for today, I found a common thread developing. Initially, we find God speaking in Jeremiah, about the ancestors of the house of Israel, how they had moved far from him and sought worthless things, they changed their gods, and the one true God was forsaken.

In Psalm 81 we find an appeal to stubborn Israel, verse 1, "Sing aloud to God our strength, shout for joy to the God of Jacob. But my people would not listen to my voice, they would not submit to me", says God.

Even though he was prepared to take care of them, offering them land and food, protection and salvation, and deliverance, they turned away from Him. We hear in Hebrews that God had spoken to their ancestors but now speaks through his Son. Jesus came to us in both human and divine form, experiencing the things that we experience, and yet divine in nature.

So the Hebrews reading speaks about continuing in mutual love, extending hospitality to strangers, to the poor and disadvantaged, to those in prison. Live life free from the love of money. We all need money, money is good, however we need to use it wisely and not allow ourselves to become obsessed and consumed by it, rather become obsessed and consumed with Jesus!!

"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid, what can anyone do to me?" Lovely words. We find encouragement in these verses, "do not neglect to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

As we move to the Gospel reading, Luke reveals a Gospel of hospitality and humility. In our reading today, Jesus is invited to a banquet by one of the leading Pharisees, a very important man, it is a meal on the Sabbath and as always Jesus uses this banquet as an opportunity to teach and instruct.

Especially because of the behaviour of some of the guests, Jesus teaches a lesson of humility. I am always blabbing on about culture and context when studying the Bible, but it is so important to understand the significance of both culture and context in Jesus parables and stories, because it gives a whole different meaning in some cases, it takes the message to another level, e.g, the story of the Prodigal Son when the son takes his father's inheritance and spends it recklessly, it is bad enough in our culture, however in their culture he was wishing his father dead, it was just shocking. And also when the father runs to welcome the son home, the father was a nobleman a man of great importance and influence in his community and men like him did not run !! This shows us the magnitude of his love and forgiveness for the son. And therefore shows us the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness for us.

Back to the party, the banquet. There appeared to be a scramble by the guests to take the best positions at the tables or couches. The basic item of furniture at these banquet was the triclinia, it was a couch for three, a number of these triclinia were arranged in a U shape around a low table. Guests reclined on their left elbow, the place of highest honour was the central position on the couch with the second and third most important to the left and the right. After this there was still more ranking amongst the guest in the order of importance, so it would have been terribly embarrassing to be told by the host to move to a lower position, with all the shame, loss of place and with ongoing consequences.

Jesus says it is better to go to the lowest place and have the host invite you up rather than take an upper seat and be told to go down. "Better that people say to you come up, come up, rather than people say to you go down, go down". Jesus is not giving a piece of worldly advice, he is teaching people to be genuinely humble. The truly humble person will end up where they need to be, in following Jesus' advice, "we run no other risk than that of being exalted, the way to true exaltation is humility."

I guess we could liken this to an invitation for dinner with the Prime Minister or the Queen, we are not going to barge in had sit right next to them. I'm sure we would be moved on. Jesus also had some advice for the host, he should not confine his guest list to friends, relations and rich neighbours. This does not imply that Jesus is forbidding normal social life but he is emphasizing that there is little generosity in giving to people who will make a recompense. So the poor, the lame, the disadvantaged and homeless, these people cannot repay their host, to give them a feast is certainly an act of pure generosity, just as Jesus would have us do.

How do we achieve this in our community of Southlakes?

Through Dinner Church!! Rev' Mel sends out invitations via texts and Facebook. Every Tuesday morning we pray for those known to us and those unknown, trusting that Jesus holds these people in his heart, we are his hands and feet, we listen to him, we work with him as he gently leads these people into his fold. It's not our job to get them to Dinner Church or church for that matter, it's our job to work with Jesus in obedience and faith and He will fill them with his Holy Spirit and inspire them to seek him out.

So our job is to get along side people, just as Jesus did, to show them his infinite, unconditional love and compassion no matter what. We may find it difficult to deal with some of these people but we need to do as Jesus did, to show them love and kindness.

At Mother's Union last Tuesday, the Bible reading was from Romans 15: 1-13. I felt that Jesus just dropped it in front of me to be used to support and encourage us as we seek to do his will. Verses 1 -3. "We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. For Christ did not please himself". And Verse 7, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"

In any situation I always say to myself, what would Jesus say or do. Reflect deeply on His words and actions, His teachings and instructions, love one another as I have loved you, the Bible is full of it, especially the New Testament. Read it over and over until we are one with Jesus, His thoughts are our thoughts. In conclusion,

Romans 15, verse 13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN and AMEN.