

**Tidenham Church
St Luke's Tutshill
31.8.2025
Canon Ed Pruen**

Hebrews 13. 1-8, 15-16

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. ² **Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.** ³ Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

⁴ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ¹⁵ Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. ¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Luke 14.1, 7-14

¹ 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. ⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. ⁸ "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;

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." ¹² 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.

¹³ But **when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.**

¹⁴ **And you will be blessed,** because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Let us pray:

Lord, you have invited us to belong to your Church. Help us to welcome all who seek you, and thereby welcome you. In the name of ...

It was a Sunday... and the Vicar had invited two very posh members of his congregation to Sunday lunch in the Vicarage. He was keen to impress them, so, he asked his 6-year-old daughter to say grace.

But the little girl didn't know what to pray. So, she turned to her mum and asked her: *"What shall I say?"*

So, she said: *"Just say what Daddy said at breakfast".*

So she began: *"O God, we've got those awful people to lunch today!"*

Just to clarify... (!) ... you will all be happy to know that today is a very different day for George and Beryl as they celebrate their 60th Anniversary with their loved ones over lunch today!

But our readings today have a lot to say about generosity and hospitality.

And Jesus tells us that if you really want the party to go well, invite those who can't easily pay you back.

He says:

When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

And you will be blessed.

You will be blessed. (Luke 14.13)

Jesus was always turning everything upside down. Not only the tables in the Temple in Jerusalem, but our attitudes and social norms.

His is a world where the first will be last, and the last come to the front of the queue.

A world where truth speaks to power from the back of a donkey.

Where the leaders wash the feet of the people.

Where the most marginalised and vulnerable, are welcomed as equals.

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Back in 1907, a man called William became the Mayor of London.

He and his wife, Annie, were keen to have a charity to support during his time in office.

And looking around London they soon became aware of the many thousands of disabled children who were homeless and living in cellars or even cupboards.

So, he invited 1200 disabled children to a slap-up meal in the Mansion House in the City of London.

He then organised a national campaign to give hampers of food for these children at Christmas.

But he didn't stop there. He persuaded the Government to give him a disused hospital in Hampshire and there he set up the Lord Mayor Treloar School and College.

He was humbled by the lives that changed. And he was blessed. And it thrives today.
For 16 years I was their Chaplain – the children and young people with disabilities taught me everything I know.
I was humbled, I was blessed.

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Perhaps the most counter cultural that Christians can be today is in our welcome of refugees and those seeking asylum.

Civilisation is always judged by the way we treat those who are most vulnerable.

Yet we live in a country of far-right extremism that demonises those who are in any way different or desperate.

Right now, the flag of St George has been hijacked and is appearing in our streets, and on motorway bridges as a statement of white supremacy.

Although, these flags have largely been made in sweatshops in China...

Of course, the irony is that St George was himself an immigrant and a person of colour.

- He never set foot in England.
- He couldn't speak a word of English.
- He was a Christian, but revered by Christian and Muslim alike.
- His commitment to good over evil is symbolised in a mythical fight with a dragon.
- And then much later, in the 14th century, he was chosen to be patron saint of England.
- Chosen for his values, his courage, strength and compassion, and for his commitment to social justice and acceptance of others.

But all that is lost on those who abuse his name.

Those who are fearful of strangers, despite their skills, their many gifts and their humanity.

Our first reading today says this:

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13.2)

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I know a family of immigrants well.

The mum and dad and their two children came over to England in a boat escaping the poverty of their country.

It was hard for them to find somewhere to live. And everywhere they looked there were signs in the windows that read: *"No blacks, no dogs, no Irish"*.

Eventually they found a one-roomed flat and shared the bathroom and kitchen with a kind and generous Asian family.

The father was well educated, but could only find work on the shop floor of a car factory in the Midlands, where he worked for the rest of his life.

The daughter grew up and became a nurse working in the NHS for over 40 years.

In case you are wondering how I know this family, the daughter was called Margaret, and we have been married for 43 years.

Not as long as you George and Beryl, but we're doing okay!
I have been humbled and I have been so very blessed.

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Sometimes it is humbling to *receive* hospitality.

I once found myself deep in the Third World in the Gambia. A colleague of mine and I were seeking out disabled children who were not getting to school. We arrived exhausted in the hut where we were staying and I unpacked my boil-in-the-bag food, determined to feed myself and not risk getting food poisoning. But that evening, around 20 local African men and women and children arrived with a large metal dish full of rice and fish heads. I swallowed my pride as we all tucked in with our fingers. I was humbled and I was blessed. And I didn't get food poisoning.

Henri Nouwen says that *"Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place."*

Christians are to be people who have changed.
We experience the radical hospitality of God.
We are humbled by his forgiveness and grace and we are blessed so much that we want to share what we have received.
We are not called to build walls of division and prejudice, but we are to extend the table. To make the table longer for those whom God is inviting.

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I remember being the vicar of a church in Nottingham. It was a very poor parish, and the church building was simply horrific. Broken glass, damp, the truly marginalised of society, living on jumble sales and food being sold well beyond the sell-by date. I had been asked by the Bishop, to close the church. I failed miserably. Instead, a builder, married to a stripper, both became Christians. He is now a very fine Anglican priest. (She gave up her job by the way). Two more members of the congregation also got ordained and one became a Reader. I was humbled, I was blessed.

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But perhaps the most humbling of meals I have ever been invited to, was while visiting a Muslim family in the Occupied West Bank. I was with the singer Martyn Joseph. We arrived on a Wednesday. But two days before, the Israeli soldiers had arrived without warning and they had bulldozed their home. Their house was reduced to a pile of concrete dust and rubble. Nothing was left. The children were silent and traumatised. The mother showed me a film on her mobile phone of the soldiers laughing in her face as her home and her memories were decimated. The father was not there; he had been arrested for refusing to pay the bill for the bulldozer.

And yet... with the help of their much-loved Christian neighbours, they fed us.
They made their table in the rubble, longer for us.
I was humbled and I was blessed.

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Jesus calls us to be radical in our compassion.
To challenge the tyranny of far-right extremism that pedals hatred.
To be a voice for the voiceless, like the remaining journalists in the Gaza.
To love and welcome everyone, whoever they are, whatever their sexuality, whatever they be, rich or poor, able bodied or diminished by dementia.
The church is theirs, not ours. The church is theirs.

But let me close with a reminder of the Challenges that were made to the Churches as the New Millenium began back in January 2000:

- We will make you welcome.
- We will be family friendly.
- We will make sure you can hear clearly.
- We will be practical and relevant.
- We will help you explore answers to your deepest questions.
- We will offer you time to stop and think in a busy life.
- We will help you to make sense of the Bible and who Jesus is.
- We will make sure your visit will be helpful and challenging.
- We will help you discover for yourself God's love, acceptance and forgiveness.
- We will offer you the chance to make a new start.

I know a lovely couple who have extended their table and welcomed so many people to a monthly lunch in the Woodcroft Christian Centre down the road.
It springs from their strong marriage of 60 years and from their Christian faith.
Their devotion is not only to each other, but to their loved ones and to those around them.
We celebrate them today – George and Beryl.
And we ask that God will bless **you** for all you mean to us.
You humble us, you bless us. Thank you.
Amen.

The sermon live on line here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fofdl2nDVMk>