

Sunday August 29 United
Luke 14 1, 7-14, Hebrews 13 1-8, 15-16

Before we get into our Gospel for today I thought it might be helpful to remind ourselves of some important aspects of dining etiquette. From the web we have the following:

One of the most contentious areas of British dining etiquette is just how much food you should leave on your plate. In about 50% of traditional British households, you should never totally clear your plate of food. This indicates that you are, indeed, full and the host has given you more than enough food. In the other 50%, to totally clear your plate indicates how delicious the meal was.

In respect of soup, tipping the bowl away from you is the correct way to eat soup. Also, you have to dip the [spoon](#) into the soup with an action that takes it away from you rather than towards you. However, when eating breakfast cereal you should tip the bowl towards you. The hard and fast rule for spoons is that savoury food is scooped away from you and sweet food towards you.

Any 'special' cutlery (eg steak knives) should arrive with the dish they are needed for.

The golden rule is that a napkin should never be used to blow your nose on. Also, napkins should be placed across the lap - tucking them into your clothing may be considered 'common'.

And of course eat a banana with knife and fork, the only food you may eat from your fingers is asparagus...

There is masses more but that will do for now.

Jesus is at a meal with some of the glitterati of the Galilee area. As ever he is being watched. He takes the opportunity to deliver his own particular brand of dining etiquette. First it's in respect of the behaviour of **guests**, and then it's about the host's **guest list**.

Let's see what he says.

Part 1. v 7-11 The guests. Read p 989

This is quite puzzling. All this stuff about not assuming you are guest of honour, but wait to be called up. Jesus seems to be advising people to be a little bit more streetwise when they go to dinner. We wonder if, at the meal he is experiencing, someone has just been put down from a place of honour he had unwisely assumed was his. Why ever is the saviour of the World involving himself in something as trivial as this? Helpfully Luke gives a pointer. This is a **'parable'** v7.

It's not about **dining**, it's about something else, earthly story with heavenly meaning and all that. So what is it about?

The advice surely is to be **humble** before God and others. The big hitters in the religious leadership of the day thought they had, through their synagogue leadership status and their ostentatious piety, earned the right to be next door to God himself.

For us too, in God's presence or in our church community, nobody may assume that they are higher up the pecking order, try to lord it over others, show off, boast, imagine that earthly eminence and priority or holding office cuts any ice in a kingdom context.

Humility is the very specific **Christian value** Jesus is teaching, recommending, demanding!

Advice to diners in the kingdom. Ie to Christians, to all who follow our Lord.

Part 2. the host and his guest list

Some advice for us to follow when we hold banquets ourselves! But the reading moves on and it's no longer **just** a parable. To some extent at least it really is dining etiquette, but it's much more than that. Having people round to dinner is not solely for the purpose of getting invited back; a reciprocal arrangement.

We are to show hospitality, generosity **to all**, especially those unable to pay us back.

Indeed there is even a promise of heavenly reward (v14) if we are able to do this.

We have now encountered the second 'Christian value'. **First humility, now generosity.** Christian values are not identical to 'nice people' values. They go further. First we saw that there is no room for the boastful 'show pony' Christian. Now not only humble, we are expected to be generously, sacrificially hospitable **as well**.

How good are we at opening our homes to others and then showing this generous hospitality to them? Maybe inviting to lunch, tea, dinner, not just folk we know well but others maybe those who start **joining us for worship**, or folk we know who are starting to enquire about the faith.

There is a view that '**spreading the word**' is not for the lay Christian but for the **professionals** to do. My reading of Jesus' words here is the opposite of that. Hospitality extended to others is a powerful way of **sharing our faith**. A key principle behind Alpha is to share food with people who are enquiring, following our Lord's lead, not charging for it. But maybe we can do the same in our own homes.

The writer to Hebrews makes a similar point.

² *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

¹⁶ *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

But of course Jesus is also pointing to a key kingdom message. **The host is God, we are his guests. An important kingdom analogy that Jesus used.** All are invited, especially the poor, the needy. (We recall that our own Lorenzo, when asked to give up the treasures of the church, produced a series of very needy folk, sick, disabled, blind and proclaimed them to be the treasures of the church, the kingdom. For his impertinence in not handing over cash he was, in August, 1752 years ago martyred.)

No, entry to the real kingdom is a free gift offered to all. We simply respond humbly to God's generosity and take up the new abundant life that he promises. The banquet, the feast, all the riches of God's kingdom offered by grace through faith.

Our starting point is to take up his offer – yes it's counter-intuitive, **unusual**, based on humility, seeing oneself as on a par with the disadvantaged folk Jesus refers to. It's not the human way, it's not business like, it does not make sound, good sense.

But it's God's way, God's offer. We have to let God be God!

Have we responded, **are we at the meal**, the great banquet, enjoying the presence of our host, our Lord? Meeting with him daily, experiencing his care and love for us, **casting our cares on him, coming close to him and experiencing his coming to us.** That's what being at the banquet involves. That's being a Christian.

Are we then further responding by showing a humble and generous hospitality to others, thereby helping them access an understanding of God's generous love towards them?

I hope so.

From Luke 14

¹ One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ 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. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

From Hebrews

² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.