

**2022-08-28 ... 10.00am Worship Service Sermon read by Mrs Jane Rylands
(written by Revd Canon Judy Hunt)
Luke 14: 1,7-17**

'Dining Etiquette: Humility & Inclusion'

I haven't travelled much around the world – unlike some here ... but from listening and reading, one of the fascinating aspects of experiencing different cultures around the world is the way each one 'does' hospitality. Many Eastern cultures have fascinating traditions that might seem unintuitive to Westerners, often based around dining habits. For instance, in China, finishing a bowl of food you have been given is taken as a signal that your host hasn't provided enough, and they will feel compelled to refill your bowl until you are, apparently, satisfied. Ethiopia has a tradition called 'gursha', which involves taking an, often large, morsel of food, wrapping it in injera – a type of flatbread – and placing it in the mouth of a dining companion. Sharing food in this way is seen as a sign of honour and a way to build social trust.

In Britain, in days gone by, there were very strict rules of etiquette governing hospitality. The Victorians wrote many books on the subject. Did you know, for example, that when hosting a dinner party, the hostess would inform the gentlemen as to which lady they were to accompany into the dining room. And, rather like those in this week's Gospel story, the order in which people were seated was an indication of their rank and importance. Even what you were to say to your dining companion was carefully directed by the etiquette manuals.

And, however strange some of them may seem, there is no doubt that these rules, conventions and traditions help societies navigate social interaction and help people behave in ways that are polite and acceptable.

So, in our Gospel reading, what must the host have thought when Jesus started quizzing the conventions of his day and telling stories that questioned the social norms? First, Jesus says don't jostle for the best, highest, position at the table. You might be disappointed. Instead, take the lowest place and see what happens – you might be pleasantly surprised. Of course, he is not attempting only to teach table manners. He is asking people adopt the mind-set of humility ... to live with humility, and this in a society where humility was very rarely considered a virtue.

Yet, humility is a mark of being a follower of Jesus.

Then he goes on to question the whole dinner party system. It still happens today: you invite us, so we have to invite you – sometimes all vying to put on the best show. And sometimes the first invitation is so that there is pressure for that return invitation - nosiness about the house ... wanting to meet their friends ... But Jesus says, invite those who really can't give anything in return. That's true hospitality and generosity. It's also counter-cultural; but it speaks the message of full inclusion. Everyone is invited. And, to really rub it in, those who would usually be excluded are to be given priority, he says. Being inclusive is also a mark of being a follower of Jesus.

Humility and inclusivity – marks of Jesus and of being a follower of Jesus.

And so the invitation to us today is to allow that light of Christ to illuminate our lives: are there aspects in which humility has been ignored ... and are there people whom we could include but never have done before?

Adapted from: <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-17/explore-and-respond#thought>

Here's a meditation to help us reflect: - based around one by **Nick Fawcett**
(**No Ordinary Stories**; © 2008; Kevin Mayhew)

“Push ourselves into the best seats in the sight of everyone else?
We wouldn't dream of it, would we?
Not that obviously anyway ...

We may well tend more to do the opposite –
Hang back and be that little bit over-humble
Even competing with others in this direction!

Neither helps the host at a meal – not pride nor false humility
Perhaps neither helps God guide us through life

“Don't think of yourself more highly than you should”
That's what St Paul wrote
A helpful insight

Don't think of yourself more highly than you should
But acknowledge **your** need
Accept **your** dependence on divine grace
Open **yourself** to all that he can teach you and give you
And all **you can share** with others

Do that, and you will not only learn the secret of true humility,
You will also discover what it is to be exalted in the Kingdom of God.”

Amen.