

## HOSPITALITY AS AN ENCOUNTER

Daniel 7:13-14

Luke 7:24-35

You might remember that at this time of year I usually preach on the subject of giving and I alternate between financial and time and talents. This year I am going to do a series of talks on “hospitality” which definitely fits in with a theme of giving but in a slightly different way. It is mission orientated, something we can all offer, something that some of us do already and something that I believe God is inviting us to do more of as a church. I have written about the background to hospitality in Jesus time in your handout together with some of the reading and listening I have done as well as giving you the four themes we will be looking at. Today my talk is entitled Hospitality as an encounter.

First.. what is the place of food in our culture? Television chefs have become celebrities and cookbooks regularly appear on the best seller lists. I expect most of you have a favourite cookery writer! Yet we seem to cook less than ever before. As a country we buy more ready meals, we spend a lot of money on dieting and if we meet up with people, we tend to go out rather than inviting them over to sample some of the delicious recipes from our own cookbooks.

But actually, I am not talking about entertaining when I use the word “hospitality”. The greek word is *philoxenos* - *philo* means love and *xenos* can mean stranger, foreigner, guest and host. Wherever it occurs, it is an encounter with someone else, showing them love and listening to them. Rosina Butterfield defines it as turning strangers into neighbours and neighbours into families. We are meeting or encountering people and welcoming them into our space. *Xenophobia* is the opposite of hospitality... Primarily we remember that God welcomes us and then we express the welcome of God, the Father, to all through tangible acts of love...ideally through giving food and shelter and relationship. But it is first and foremost an attitude of heart which Adrian will talk about next week.

So how does that match up with our two readings this morning. You might have thought that the link was “Son of Man”. Well you are right. The Son of Man is the title that Jesus prefers to use when he talks about himself... he never uses the title Christ or Messiah...and he often talks about why he has come, his purpose. - Luke quotes Jesus saying that he came to seek and save the lost. This statement we have heard today is a statement of method - how did Jesus come? *He came eating and drinking (Luke 7:34)* The Son of Man, which basically means the human being, is Daniel’s name for the one who comes before God to receive authority over the nations after the world has been taken over by forces of evil. For now, I want to concentrate on the Son of Man coming *eating and drinking*. The Jews of Jesus day would have said the Son of Man will come to vindicate the righteous and defeat God’s enemies. They would never have said that he would come eating and drinking.

And Luke is not talking about just the normal eating and drinking. Jesus says “*The son of man has come eating and drinking and you say ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.* One of his disciples, Matthew, was a tax collector who he must regularly have eaten with and we also know that, when he ate, much to the Pharisees annoyance, at another tax collector’s house - Zacchaeus - an amazing transformation took place.

Jesus was seriously into eating and drinking - so much so that his enemies accused him and his disciples of doing it to excess. Earlier in Luke's gospel the Pharisees had said to him: *"The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees but yours eat and drink."* (Luke 5:33)

Robert Karries in his book *"Eating your way through Luke's Gospel"* suggests that in it Jesus is always *"either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal"*. and we will be looking at some of these occasions over the course of this month. Jesus also told stories about feasts and parties so it would seem that eating and drinking were paramount in his mission here on earth. Meals were more than food. They were and still are social occasions that represent friendship, community and welcome. And, most importantly, they were how the church grew so quickly in the first few centuries. HOSPITALITY IS so ORDINARY YET has so much potential.

When I talk about hospitality, I do not mean entertaining. Entertaining is when you expect to be asked back and you make a big effort to impress. Hospitality is when people see you in your own house as you are and they do not feel they have to reciprocate, enjoying soup and bread just as much as a three course nigella lawson meal. *"Dinner at Granny's included a table set with linen cloth and napkins and everyone felt like royalty at her table,"* remembers Kathy Callahan-Howell. *"But hospitality at Granny's house extended far beyond the table ware. Hospitality was a way of life, an attitude that honoured the guest no matter who that person might be or how unexpected their appearance.... Granny knew how to listen. Guests not only felt welcome, but even valued. She concludes, "We can easily feel that a ministry of hospitality requires money to share food or lodging, when really the greatest treasure to offer is welcome. That requires little monetary expense but great personal risk, the risk of vulnerability"* Let's pause for a moment to watch a short video.

With each passing year, our culture becomes increasingly post-Christian. People are more hostile to the gospel of Jesus than ever before...in some ways we have become unwelcome guests in this world and it is really hard to know what we can say to our neighbours about our faith. And yet this is nothing new, since we know that Jesus himself faced anger and antagonism in his culture. But how did he overcome that? One meal at a time.

As a church we already have our regular coffee mornings - or tea party as in the case of last month. They are important for both relationships and fund raising and people enjoy the camaraderie. I would like us to go one step further. Jesus asked himself to people's houses when he encountered them and though I am not suggesting that, I would like us to offer hospitality in a slightly different way beginning during Lent. I have agreed with 2 of the PCCs - Great Ness is on Wed - that we have a weekly soup lunch in the benefice to which the local community is invited and, instead of raising funds for the church, any donations will go to a charity of our choice. This will take the focus off us needing money and help us to focus outward on those who might welcome company at a meal time. Please think about who you might invite to come along and also let me know if you would be happy to help host one. And if you want to take this further, if you feel brave enough, how about asking someone you don't know very well to go for a coffee at Cafe Eleven or a drink at the pub.

Many people view hospitality as a nice thing to do. While there's nothing wrong with enjoying the relationships we have, it's important to keep reaching out with the specific purpose of sharing God's love. Hospitality is a calling; not just for a few of us, but for all of us. Jesus' encounters often led to hospitality and so it can be the same for us today. -