

Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church: Sunday 10th January 2021

Bible Reading: Luke 14:12-24:

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbours—for they will invite you back, and in this way you will be paid for what you did. ¹³ When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they are not able to pay you back. God will repay you on the day the good people rise from death.”

¹⁵ When one of the guests sitting at the table heard this, he said to Jesus, “How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God!” ¹⁶ Jesus said to him, “There was once a man who was giving a great feast to which he invited many people. ¹⁷ When it was time for the feast, he sent his servant to tell his guests, ‘Come, everything is ready!’ ¹⁸ But they all began, one after another, to make excuses. The first one told the servant, ‘I have bought a field and must go and look at it; please accept my apologies.’ ¹⁹ Another one said, ‘I have bought five pairs of oxen and am on my way to try them out; please accept my apologies.’ ²⁰ Another one said, ‘I have just gotten married, and for that reason I cannot come.’ ²¹ The servant went back and told all this to his master. The master was furious and said to his servant, ‘Hurry out to the streets and alleys of the town, and bring back the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ ²² Soon the servant said, ‘Your order has been carried out, sir, but there is room for more.’ ²³ So the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the country roads and lanes and make people come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you all that none of those who were invited will taste my dinner!’”

Sermon “Food for thought”

Jesus was a Jew and he lived predominantly among Jewish people. If you spoke to your neighbour in his context, then the very high chance is that they would share the same faith as you. And even if your neighbour was a Gentile, that’s a non-Jew, then they would still most likely have a faith, or at least be searching for deeper meaning and purpose in life.

We live in radically different days, where faith, meaning and purpose in the west are the exception, rather than the rule. Where many are lost, living from one moment to the next and distracted by the endless bombardment of the banality of modern life, slaves to consumerism, status updates and social media alerts.

We live in post Christendom, in a country that can no longer claim to be Christian. And while our neighbours might choose this label, what most are really saying is that they were maybe baptised as a child, or simply that they are not a Moslem. It’s reckoned that only about 10% of the UK population is now Christian by faith.

So, we belong to a minority, but this offers us opportunity to take a new perspective on life and being church in the 21st Century. It gives us permission to let go of the hinderances of our past and be a creative minority in the present, in radically different living, in our praise and our humble service to others. To be a prophetic minority, like salt keeping God’s world wholesome and tasty. And being a hopeful minority, living in joy, in courage and in gratitude for God and the vision he has given us, which so many lack.

The story is set with Jesus dining with the religious leaders and giving them advice. They are not just to invite people those they are comfortable with to their next dinner party but instead they are to

invite people who are poor and people who have a wide range of abilities. This would have been as difficult to hear back then as it is today. We like to invite people we have a lot in common with, people we go to church with, people who can reciprocate and invite us back, people it's useful to know, people who might even get us up a wrung of the ladder and get us further on in the world. We might hear these words of Jesus and squirm, they make us uncomfortable.

We might say that social conditions have changed considerably since Jesus said this, we're a lot more private these days, people don't live in such small communities as he did anymore, where everyone knows everyone else's business... although maybe just, in Dreghorn and Springside we're more likely to, than folks in the urban sprawls that surround us. And maybe because we were living under tight COVID conditions when we can't even see granny or the grandkids, never mind extending invitations to others, we might think this is not required to think about such things at this time - but now is the time, the time to think and to plan - and after all, we all eat, and there's going to be lots of hungry people out there looking for both food and fellowship. This is something we can all be involved in.

Jesus tells us a story, the parable of the Great Banquet. This story is obviously about people who rudely snub the invitation to attend a very splendid party. They make all the excuses under the sun, but the householder has gone to great expense of organising and paying for such a lavish feast. He is determined to have guests enjoy what he has put on the table, even if these guests come from more unexpected locations.

On one level, the meaning in this parable is quite clear. Jesus has been going around summoning people to God's Kingdom. The moment has now arrived, the banqueting table is ready, and Jesus says, "come, come and follow me". But the people who have been waiting for God to finally make this invite refuse, they refuse to follow. But then there are others who delighted to be invited; they are the shunned, the runners up, the not good enoughs, the ones used to being physically distanced from, the least, the last, the lost. God invites them, and they follow, and they banquet!

Do you know that we are the ones, you and me are the ones who were delighted to be invited, we are the Gentiles that accepted the invitation that most Jews of Jesus day refused. We are ones who accepted the invitation to follow Jesus to this heavenly banquet... the first course of which is to be served here on earth.

Because in this parable Jesus is saying to you and me: if you are going to follow me, if you are going to be my apprentices, then this is what I expected of you. You are to be a people of invitation. You are to intentionally seek out, hang out with, eating with and love others, especially the least, the last and the lost. We, who have accepted the invitation, now become the ones who are to invite others.

Sharing food is something that Jesus practiced often, so much so that his enemies called him a "drunk and a glutton", it is a great way to get to know people and for people to get to really know us. It's a great place to listen and share our stories.

On the Forge Course we have been exploring new church plants, like the one that we are planning for over in Towerlands. We've spoken at length with two new churches; one is called "the New Charter" in Tollcross, Glasgow. It's a former notorious pub that's been redeemed as a church and is now serving its community. And the other is "Family Tree" a group in Pollok who meet in someone's house for food, sometimes in a rented church hall for food and worship and also on the streets being of help to others and sharing testimony of what is to be a follower of Jesus living in Pollok. Both are great expressions of 21st Century Church, and one of the things that unites them is their shared love

for food. Food gathers people together round a table, where everyone is fed - and community and conversation, God-filled conversation - grows from there.

The early Christians were known for having generous hearts and sharing food. In Acts chapter 2:46 onwards we read, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

One of the books I'm reading just now talks about the first churches, there we read: "Many neighbours would have overheard activity around a common meal in a small room or an open courtyard that was characterised by great joy, singing? Laughter? In the midst of the urban chaos and misery that characterised every ancient Mediterranean city, such a gathering must have sounded inviting indeed." I bought the book second-hand and, in the margin, someone had written before me "can I come?!"

"Can I come?" Well, who isn't compelled by food and laughter? What do you think?

Jamie Milliken
10th January 2021