

Service for Sunday 21 June Revd Pauline Crispin

As we begin this time of worship. I invite you to be settled and comfortable and focus on your breathing for a minute or two. Then as you breathe in, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and imagine the 'breath of God' filling you as your own breath goes in. As you breathe out, ask God to take away the things that are distracting you from worship. Breathe at a pace that is natural for you.

Breathe in: God's Holy Spirit Breathe out: Distractions Breathe in: God's Holy Spirit Breathe out: Distractions. Repeat this until you feel ready to move on.

Luke 14: 1-14

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. ² Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not reply to this.

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

We thank you Lord, that Jesus had time for people, he welcomed everybody to sit around his table.

We remember how Jesus taught his friends that people who put themselves last are first in Your eyes Lord.

Help us to think about the people we need to put first: the poor, the lonely, the weak and the vulnerable. Help us to share with them all the gifts that you have given to us, the gifts of our time, our energy, our patience, and our understanding. Help us to always remember that nobody is too unimportant or insignificant to receive the peace, love and joy that Jesus gives so freely. **Amen.**

- 1 My God, I am thine ;
 what a comfort divine,
 what a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine !
 In the heavenly Lamb
 thrice happy I am,
 and my heart it doth dance at the sound of his name.

- 2 True pleasures abound
 in the rapturous sound ;
 and whoever hath found it hath paradise found.
 My Jesus to know,
 as rejoicing I go
 to my life everlasting, 'tis heaven below.

- 3 Yet onward I haste
 to the heavenly feast :
 that, that is the fullness ; but this is the taste ;
 and this I shall prove,
 till with joy I remove
 to the heaven of heavens in Jesus's love.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 80

Jesus has been invited to a meal at the house of an influential Pharisee. Luke implies that the invitation had been issued so that the Pharisee and his associates could 'watch Jesus closely'. It is worth noting that Jesus was saying the same kind of things Pharisees said. The problem lay not with the content of his teaching, but with his authority. Those at the table would not have disagreed with the advice Jesus gave to guests and hosts. Like Jesus, the Pharisees would have spoken out against Greek and Roman cultural customs about honour and shame.

The guests' positions would depend upon their relationship with the host. The advice Jesus gives the guests seems very sensible, because it is about seeking honour rather than shame! The theme of reversal of fortunes is a central theme in Luke's Gospel. Jesus' advice to hosts is more controversial. Those hosting a meal would invite people of the same social status as themselves and would expect to be invited back in return. There would be no reason to invite people who would be in no position to return the favour and it would be suicidal to eat with people you would be ashamed to be seen with! What if your friends heard about it? However, this is not an ordinary meal, it is a wedding banquet (v.8), an analogy often used for the feast that would take place when God's kingdom came. In the kingdom of God, those who were shunned by society will be assured of their places at God's table. Those who anticipate the kingdom now, by including those at the bottom of the social ladder, will be blessed because they are ensuring their own place at the future banquet.

Christian understanding challenged the prevailing views about honour and shame in the Roman world. Two thousand years have gone by, yet social status is still highly valued by many and people still court the favour of those who can help them to climb ladders, whether they seek promotion or are applying for membership of the local golf club! Jesus invites the Church and individual Christians to examine their motives and behaviour. Eating together is a feature of community life. Those who sit at table together are those who belong. Whom do we prefer not to invite into our own homes and share our table?

Let us pray: Lord God, there is always someone wants to be first. First in the queue. First in the pecking order. Leader of the group. **Lord, please let me be willing to be last.**

There is always someone wants to be last. Last to offer friendship to the new boy or girl in class. Last to bring in their sponsor money for charity. Last to offer to lead a lunchtime activity for the younger ones. **Lord, please let me be willing to be first.**

'The last will be first and the first will be last.' When you lived here, you turned people's ideas upside down. You wanted people to think and act like you. You want us to do this today. **Lord, please let me know and understand when it is right to be first and when it is right to be last. Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

I invite you to reread the lesson for today. Then you might find it helpful to close your eyes and revisit the breathing prayer that was at the start of this sheet. Thinking about the reading from Luke. Are you able to imagine the room in the Pharisee's home? The meal would have been eaten at low tables set out in the shape of a rectangle with one end open or missing. The guests would recline in Roman style. The Pharisee who was the host with be in the middle of the top table. Where are you going to sit? Give yourself a moment, decide and take your place. Note we are not told where Jesus is sat. It is up to you to place him at the scene. You then notice the man with dropsy (water retention). You watch as Jesus heals him. What is the reaction of those in the room? What is your reaction and response? Or maybe you are the person who Jesus heals in the scene. In which case what do you feel, what do you notice?

When Jesus starts to speak about not taking the best places for yourselves and putting others before your needs, what are your thoughts? Do you feel that your place at the table is secure? Is it right? Are you being stopped from having the place you feel you should have, or are you stopping others from having the place they should have? Stay in the home a little longer to see if there are other things you notice. When you decide to leave the scene reengage with the breathing prayer before you move on to the words of the hymn.

Sing or read:

- 1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them ?
Whom shall I send ?
Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord ?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain ;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send ?

3 I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send ?

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The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love, this day and for evermore. Amen

