

Homily Trinity 12 2025

It bears remembering every day if we can manage it, that God loves us, you, me, everyone, just as we are, just where we are, he loves us unconditionally no matter what, nothing can separate us from God's love. Everything starts with God's love for us. If you never remember anything else I say, try and remember God's love for us.

We are, in our readings on the journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and towards the Cross, it is a journey crowded with incident - encounters, healings and teachings as Jesus uses the limited time he has on earth to get the message of the kingdom of God to as many people as possible.

The message of Jesus, as Luke presents it, was from the beginning so radical loving inclusive and so different that it raised suspicion amongst religious conservatives and the politically powerful, as it still does today.

So in chapter 14 Luke tells us of Jesus going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, he adds that they were watching him closely, fearful perhaps or just continually suspicious because his teachings are so radical.

In the Beatitudes, for example, blessedness is the condition of those who are poor, who are hungry, who weep, and who endure hatred, exclusion, insult, and defamation on Jesus' account (6:20–23). In the feeding of the 5,000, just being present and being hungry ensured all the people were fed. It's just not what the religious people of the time were expecting of a Messiah.

Neither was the parable he told at the meal. First, the story about the guests at a Roman style banquet choosing their seats according to their presumed rank. Jesus told them to choose a low status seat, to be humble not arrogant, so that they could be raised higher, rather than starting high and being demoted when someone more important arrived. Then he told those who were going to hold a dinner not to invite only those friends neighbours and relatives who would reciprocate and invite them back, instead to think radically and lovingly and invite instead "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.'

Jesus is inviting his hearers to imagine a transformative web of relationships woven in mercy and strengthened not through patronage or obligation but through joyous connection, through mutual love as the writer to the Hebrews defines it, across lines of difference.

He is contrasting two different ways of seeing the world – two ways of dealing with each other. The first is completely transactional, the exchange economy. It works on a quid pro quo basis: this much product requires this much in exchange.

This system seems reasonable to many, because it feels fair and makes sense. But it is not how God behaves with his people and Jesus does not believe in it at all. God looks deeper than superficial appearance or markers of status and Jesus wants us to learn to see as God sees.

So he presents a very different model of interaction – the grace or gift economy. Here there is no relation between what we give and what we get. Those who he suggests should be invited to the meal have done absolutely nothing to earn the banquet set before them. But Jesus is showing us that this is how God acts. God's kingdom runs on the gift economy, of God's grace, God's unconditional love and generosity.

But even as Christians we often resist these ideas, though we long to know God's unconditional love, it still doesn't seem quite fair. We feel that we have worked hard for whatever we have got or achieved and deserve a reward or two. It reminds me of the parable of the labourers who all received the same pay, though for different lengths of working time, the ones who had worked all day were really put out when everyone got the same. It never occurred to them that the master, who hired them, knew that all their needs were similar and so was generous.

Looking at Jesus' s story when we see who he encourages the host to invite, those who are mostly excluded, then we can understand that Jesus is actually saying 'when it comes to God, it is all gift . No one actually deserves anything. Everything is given to us freely and undeservedly by God.

When we start to live within this gift economy, things can be transformed. All our lives begin as God's gift to us, and as we understand this then we can transform the lives of others by our own unconditional kindnesses and gifts. Sam Wells, Rector of St Martin in the Fields, observes in one

of his books, that no generous action is ever wasted, many are never forgotten and many prove to be unexpected sources of blessings much later on.

As the letter to the Hebrews has reminded us earlier saying 'Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' Abraham famously did just that.

Interestingly in the letter to the Hebrews, mutual love is a kind of verbal shorthand for behaviour and attitudes that build, preserve and strengthen the community.

The offering of hospitality to both friends and strangers is a strand running through out scripture, of mutual love and care, as well as a survival strategy for living in harsh climates and deserts. But also, again as the writer to the Hebrews recognised these are gospel values reminding the readers 'Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.'

The good news of God's kingdom is that there really is another way of building social relationships and community, and not all relationships are based on power and mutual obligation. We can see it already in the many different ways there are of reaching out, connecting with, and including others, recognising them as God's children, made in God's image ,brothers and sisters in the human family. We can see this week by week as we share communion together, God's free gift of himself to us as his children.

We are called to be those who are following in Jesus's footsteps living in radical love and hospitality, being transformed ourselves as we live, as we share the good news of the Gospel with love and humility, promoting not ourselves, but the prodigal overflowing grace of God.

All disciples, and so by extension, we too ,will be blessed when we honour and serve those in need. Loving enemies, being merciful, doing good and so and on, radical love and service of others without expecting anything in exchange. Living this way is really hard work, but it is vital and much needed.

Because looking around us we can see not only that the world we live in is so divided by mistrust, violence hatred cruelty and fear, but also the only possible solutions we can see in action are those where we are

building communities of trust, reconciliation, support, prayer and mutual love, where we are actively bringing the values of God's kingdom into all the places where we are, especially in our churches, our workplaces, our families and our friendship groups, we are called to be living lives seeking to follow in the way of Jesus and praying always -- so we pray:

God of Love

You invite us to your banquet,

not because we deserve it, but because you love us.

Grant us the humility to accept your gift,

Fill us with this radical love to share

the transforming power of the Gospel,

and draw others into your Kingdom. Amen