

Sermon 29th August 2010
10.30 Morning Worship Trinity 13 Luke 14: 7-14

The following article was printed in the International Express Newspaper this month

Brits just can't wait

Britons are no longer happy to wait in line.

Two out of five reach breaking point after queuing for just two minutes.

A poll of 2 000 adults found that two thirds even give up on purchases after getting impatient.

Food and drink outlets frustrate people the most and more than half of those quizzed said they refused to go into a supermarket if they saw a queue at the till.

The research was carried out by Barclays and Barclaycard.

How patient are you in queues?

Have you ever looked into Sainsbury, looked at the long queue with just one check out open and decided to go elsewhere for your purchases? I know I have.

Have you ever gone into a restaurant and had to wait so long to be served that you got impatient and decided to go elsewhere. I know my husband has!

Britain used to be known of a nation of people who queued but has this changed?

Part of today's passage is about people pushing to get the best seats.

Let's first consider the background to today's Reading. Jesus is in the latter part of his ministry. His early ministry was to people around the shores of Lake Galilee and he is now journeying towards Jerusalem.

The Pharisees were the larger of two religious sects. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were always trying to trap Jesus, always trying to get Him to say something they could pounce on and say, "See, see, I told you He was a fraud."

Jesus said some pretty scathing remarks about the Pharisees. At times he called them white washed tombs, self righteous, a brood of vipers, hypocrites. No wonder he was not top of the pops with them.

Luke 14: 1-7 sets the scene for today's Reading

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" And they had nothing to say.

Jesus is invited to eat with a prominent Pharisee but Jesus isn't invited because they want to honour him. No.

He is being watched by the Pharisees. They want to catch him out and to gather evidence with which to accuse him.

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It is a Sabbath, a day when no work is to be done. The Pharisees are sticklers for the Sabbath, taking its observance far beyond that which the law ever intended.

The sick man, how did he come to be there?

Did the prominent Pharisee invite him?

It doesn't look as if this sick man was invited to the meal but I get the feeling that the Pharisee had arranged for him to be there, and if so then he would have been invited. The Pharisees want to see what Jesus would do.

Jesus knows what the Pharisees are thinking and he challenges them : *is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not*' and they make no reply. So Jesus asks them "*Is there anyone here who, if a child or an animal fell down a well, wouldn't rush to pull him out immediately*". Now not only is this question based on good common sense, but it is also one based upon the Pharisees' own legal tradition. After generations of debate they have determined that it is indeed lawful to pull a child or an animal out of a dangerous situation on the Sabbath. It is the right thing to do. So if that is the case, Jesus in his question reasons, isn't it also right to "pull" this man out of another dangerous situation by healing him?

Next the host announces dinner; there is a mad scramble to get the best seats, that's the ones nearest to the host at the top. There is no seating plan. Jesus stands back and watches them. Previously they had watched his reactions and now it's his turn to watch their actions. He sees them pushing to get the most prestigious seats and he tells a parable. It's not like his usual parables. He bases this parable on Proverbs 25: 6-7 which is

*6 Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among great men;*

*7 it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"
than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.
What you have seen with your eyes*

Jesus uses their knowledge of the Bible to criticise their behaviour and by using this Proverb he is using verses which they would be familiar with. Verses that they should be following. These people, these Pharisees really are hypocritical and self-righteous. Their way is not the way of the Kingdom of God which Jesus is proclaiming. God does not want people to be proud. Instead, he gives honour to the humble.

Jesus has a way of up-ending accepted social patterns and assumptions. In Matthew 23:11 he says "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last" he claims that the great will one day serve the lowly. It's a reminder that humble service is at the heart of the Christian life, and the mark of a true servant of Christ.

Jesus then turns his attention to his host. He tells the prominent Pharisee that when he has a feast he should *invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*. Those he's invited are the dignitaries, those who hold high offices. This was rather like the mayor holding a

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dinner party and asking the town councilors, chairman of the Rotary, leaders of the Chamber of Commerce. Jesus would challenge the mayor to invite for example people who are disabled, maybe with Downs Syndrome, the homeless, people who wouldn't invite him back or give him any additional power but who would feel honoured to be included. Jesus says that if the Pharisee does this he will be blessed by God.

But my question is, what has that to do with us or with the church today?

I think that Jesus is reminding us that we need to reach out to invite people to church who are not the ones who we might think would want to know Jesus. It's not just our nice middle class neighbours, well yes it is them but it's also to include the elderly, the blind, the teenagers on drugs, those who frequent the betting shops, the pubs, night clubs, those who have STIs or AIDS. In fact everyone who doesn't know Jesus yet and those who wouldn't dream of coming to church unless someone invited them. Do you know that there is nothing more daunting than walking through a church door on a Sunday for the first time. I know because I wouldn't have gone to church all those years ago unless my daughter's friend had invited her and she in turn asked me for a lift and I decided I might as well stay for the service because it would only last for one hour and to go home and come back and get her seemed to be a waste of time. I didn't know anyone there and I didn't know the church etiquette. It all felt very strange but also I was attracted by the service and the peace. I went every week after that and so did my daughter and I'm still going.

Jesus tells his host to invite those who cannot repay him because God will bless him. My question is, how does this relate to us? Who should we invite and to what? I wonder who you could ask to church or to one of our gatherings like the Breakfasts, the Afternoon Fellowship, any meeting where Jesus will be spoken of. You might ask someone round to coffee and pray for an opening to talk about Jesus. Once you have invited someone or spoken about Jesus to them then you have done all you need to do. After that it's up to the Lords to do his work in a person's life. Do not be discouraged if you see no results or if your invitation is turned down. There was a missionary once who worked his whole life in Africa and he only made one convert. He returned to England a very disappointed person. Many years later missionaries were allowed back into that same country and to their surprise they found a flourishing church. The one person who that man had converted had brought others to Jesus and that one fruit had produced many other fruits. So do not be disappointed if your work for the Lord does not produce any visible fruits that you can see.

Jesus is the way the truth and the life. Paul writes in Romans 10: 14 - How shall they know if they do not hear and how shall they hear if no one tells them and I would add how shall they hear if they do not come and how shall they come if no one asks them. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Jesus invites people to come.

Let us take a few moments to be quiet before the Lord so he can speak to each one of us concerning anything that has been said this morning.

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Questions:

1. Sunday used to be a day when there were few shops open but now most of the shops are open. Do you think that this is a good idea? In your group discuss the pros and cons of how people spend their Sundays.
2. Why is it that the chairs in the back rows of a service are full and the front ones are empty? Is it that the back rows are the most prestigious? What do you think?
3. Read Matthew 23: 8-36. How did the Pharisees exalt themselves?
4. Read 1 Peter 4: 9-10 and Hebrews 13: 1-2. Hospitality is very important gift. Think of the many different ways we can show hospitality to one another and to a stranger. Discuss your ideas and when might this be difficult for each one of us?
5. Did you come to church or a church meeting in response to an invitation from someone, if you did share your experiences with your group.