

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 14:1-14 (NT page 1047-1048)

Reader: Aileen McGrath

Who would you invite to your special dinner?

Our reading is a typical reflection of Biblical values and ethics. As it was a society shaped by honour and shame you had to make sure to invite only the people that had either the same honour as you did or even who had higher honour. If you invited someone to your table that had less honour than you had, then you lost your honour and was regarded as “shameful”.

In our reading Jesus went on the Sabbath to a meal at a home of a very important man, a leading Pharisee, a man with great honour. Then someone who had been unwell came up to him, assuming that Jesus would heal him. But Jesus was clever enough to know the rules that existed for honouring the Sabbath. SO He asked the religious leaders if their laws allowed healing on the Sabbath?

As part of the honour and shame value system, you could challenge the honour of other important people by asking them questions. When they could not answer or respond, it meant that you had the honour and they were in shame.

In this case Jesus clearly had the upper hand and had the honour. And because they were in shame, they could not really respond when Jesus did heal the man.

It is remarkable that Jesus continues to challenge them a second time when He asks them what they will do when one of their sons or an ox happens to fall into a well on the Sabbath. Will they try to pull them out or just leave them because it is the Sabbath? And again, although they were so clever and important, they could not answer Jesus. For a second time Jesus showed them that He had more honour.

Then when Jesus noticed how some of the guests chose the best seats, He told them a parable which was really a critique of the honour and shame value system. He told them not to go for the best seats, thinking that they had the highest honour. They will be embarrassed when they will have to give up their seat to someone who has more honour than they have and in the event have to sit in the lowest place because all the places are taken. No instead they must go for the lowest place, so that the host can come up to them and give them a better place. Then they will receive greater honour. Jesus added saying that for everyone who thinks that they have the highest honour, will be shamed and those who find themselves in a shameful position, will receive honour.

Jesus turned to his host and again challenged the values of his day. When you had honour, you would invite people who had the same honour or greater honour. This was regarded as a challenge to the honourees, which would have had to be countered by inviting them to your house. Now Jesus says NO. Don't invite people who has the same honour as you have. Invite the shameful people, those who are unclean and regarded as unholy such as the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. They will not be able to challenge your honour and indeed will make you shameful, but God will bless and reward you on the day these people rise from death.

Jesus was emphasising the point that they were seeking honour in the wrong place. Honour and shame is not important at all. What is important is to have "honour in the eyes of God", to seek the values of the Kingdom of God and not run after the values of this world. Those who seek the values of the Kingdom of God will take care of all those who are regarded as shameful in the eyes of their society. Jesus came to this world not for those who think they are healed but to heal the sick.

Communion must remind us all again about God's values. Jesus who had the most honour, died a shameful death as a sacrifice to all the sinners. He died so that all those who have faith in Him can live in a relationship with God. Communion is a stark reminder of the cost Jesus had paid to free you and me from sin, death and hell.

But communion is also about our values. Who would we invite to a special dinner?

Will we also invite all the important people, those who have a lot of status or money so that other people can measure our status and importance or will we invite people whom we really care about and love? What about those who are outcasts? Communion is all about sitting together, as brothers and sisters in faith. If communion do not bring people together, and challenge people to work together then the real feast of the Lord did not take place at all.

A minister from South Africa wrote in the week that he experienced love as he had never seen it before. He was jogging with his new trainers when he came across two very poor men walking in front of him. One had shoes on that had no hardly any sole on it while the other had nothing on. Then to his surprise another man came from the opposite direction on a bicycle. He stopped, took off his own shoes and threw it to the man who had no shoes!

Remarkable, don't you think?

I guess Jesus is telling us all who think that we are more important than other people - to actually think of what God is asking us to do. Maybe God is challenging us to show His forgiving love in a radical way, forgetting a wee bit ourselves and think of others less fortunate than ourselves. If it is to take off our shoes, then we must do it, despite our own self importance.

Communion challenge us all to go from here and share the love of God in different but concrete, practical ways with each and every human being we come in contact with.

Amen