

LUKE 14:1, 7-14
ST JOHN'S, 1.9.19, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

If there's one thing I'm famous for, locally, more than another it's my Candlelight Suppers. Whenever word begins to spread (and it always does!) that Hyacinth Bucket is planning yet another of her elegant Candlelight Suppers, everybody who's anybody in our little town waits on pins and needles to see whether one of my engraved invitations will drop through their letter box. Why, people in The Avenue have been known to rush my Postman when they see him coming down the street – that's how eager they are! Yes, I'm afraid if you haven't been to a Candlelight Supper at The Bucket Residence it cannot be said that you've 'arrived', socially.¹

(Quoted from Hyacinth Bucket's Book of Better Class British Cookery, with apologies to Patricia Routledge).

Dinner parties can be a social quagmire! Maybe the host is trying to impress their guests with their *cordons bleu cuisine*, or with a 'guest of honour'. Other guests might be looking to see what they can get out of the occasion, in terms of contacts. Or host and guests may be colluding to make one or two of those present feel as if they really don't belong in such exalted company.

It seems as if the Sabbath meal we've just heard about was some sort of set up. The Pharisees were plotting against Jesus (Luke 6:11), and on

this occasion, at a leading Pharisee's house, people *were watching* Jesus *carefully* (v 1).

TEACHING ABOUT BEING A GUEST (vv 7-11)

I'm sure that we've all been to the kind of wedding reception where our place at the table reflects our importance in the eyes of whoever has put together the seating plan. The further we are from the 'top table', the less important we're considered to be!

That kind of hierarchy was frequently observed at dinner parties in C1 Palestine, but there wouldn't be a pre-arranged seating plan with name cards at the places. On this occasion, there was a scramble for the best places, the places nearest to the host. Jesus gives people some very sensible advice: *when you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person', and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place* (vv 8-9). Instead, Jesus recommends sitting in the lowest place, because then you're likely to be honoured by an invitation to move up to a more exalted position.

This is very good advice from a worldly point of view, but of course that's not Jesus' main concern. He's looking forward to his own *wedding feast*, and the people enjoying the Pharisee's hospitality that day would have known Isaiah's description of the Lord preparing a *for all peoples a feast* (Isaiah 25:6). They'd have understood it as a picture of heaven. Jesus is warning that no-one will get into the eternal banquet on the basis of their own merit, whether they claim it on the

basis of their position in the church, their reputation in the community, or even their own good opinion of themselves. And no-one is debarred from the eternal banquet, whether by their position in the church, their reputation in the community, or the bad opinion of their neighbours. As we'll say together a little later, Jesus welcomes us, *emptied of pride and hungry for [his] grace*, to his kingdom's feast.² That's the only basis on which any of us gets a place at the Lord's table. None of us can earn the right to be there. The invitation is for anyone and everyone, simply because the Lord wants to share the feast with whoever chooses to be there. So don't allow thoughts of social status, or the need to 'network', spoil your enjoyment of whatever dinner parties you're invited to in the here and now, either.

TEACHING ABOUT BEING A HOST (vv 12-14)

If we think of ourselves as the guests at the heavenly banquet, then the host will be the Lord himself. Jesus has some advice here for those hosting dinner parties: *When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind* (v 13) – people who have nothing worldly to give back, people who have no worldly status which will reflect well on you as their host. Again, it's good worldly advice; we never know when people's fortunes will turn round, and they'll remember those who were good to them when they were 'down and out'. And, of course, as our reading from Hebrews has reminded us, *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares* (Hebrews 13:2).

Jesus' words here remind us that everybody is somebody to the Lord and in the Lord. If we're genuine disciples of Christ, we'll show no partiality to others. We might be giving a party; we might be giving our time; we might be giving our money: in all that we do what matters is our motive for doing it. Are we trying to impress our neighbours? Are we trying to make friends and influence people? Are we 'networking'? Or are we simply seeking to serve others, and to show them something of God's love?

But equally, we need to remember that the heavenly *wedding feast* will be full, not just of the *poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind*, but people who've been thieves, travellers, murderers, drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes, and worse. Jesus warned the religious leaders of his day that *the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the Kingdom of God before you* (Matthew 21:31). If we're not prepared to share the feast with whoever chooses to be there, we risk being the ones left on the outside.

CONCLUSION

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (v 11). If we truly trust in the Lord, then we'll be set free from all concern for our own personal status or advantage. We'll be able to leave all that with the Lord, trusting him to provide for our needs, and seeking only his glory and the extension of his kingdom.

As we reflect on the fact that a place at the heavenly *wedding feast* is reserved for us, simply because the Lord would love each one of us to join his celebration, so we should be able to echo the words of an old him, often attributed to St Francis Xavier:

My God, I love thee; . . .

Not for the sake of winning heaven,
nor of escaping hell;

not from the hope of gaining aught,
not seeking a reward;

but as thyself hast lovèd me,

O ever-loving Lord.³

¹ Carole Jackson, [Hyacinth Bucket's Book of Better Class British Cookery](http://hyacinthbucketscookbook.weebly.com), (hyacinthbucketscookbook.weebly.com), chapter 6

² The Church in Wales, [An Order for the Holy Eucharist](#) (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2004), p 3

³ *My God, I love thee; not because*, translated by Edward Caswall; [Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised](#) (London, Clowes, 1950), Hymn No 106