

Sermon 1st September 2013

Eaglehawk Uniting Church

Rev Ralph Clarke

Reading: Jer. 2:1-13; Luke 14:1-14;

N.....(Pick a person in the Congregation) has invited us all to a party. Jesus will also be there. Yeh! Yeh! you say. That happened 2000 years ago. Jesus doesn't go to meals & parties anymore. But he does. I've seen a sign up in some homes that says "Jesus is the head of this house & the silent listener to every conversation". Jesus only seems absent when faith refuses to acknowledge his presence.

Luke tells us quite a few stories of parties – one that follows this one, & 3 in the next chapter 15 after the lost coin, sheep & son were found. Luke sees parties as celebrations of God's new life & of our joy as God's people.

But having Jesus to a meal might be a bit uncomfortable. What would you talk about? What if you do something wrong in front of Jesus? What will he think of you? You might feel a bit exposed. All the stuff you've been able to keep hidden for years – could be out in the open. You might be criticised. Worse, he might include you in the parable of the dinner party that Luke tells us about today.

In Jesus story, a group of people go to the home of an influential person. There was a bit of social jostling by guests for places of honour beside the host. Sometimes we see this competition, not in where people want to sit at a party, but in their story of the best holiday place, or the best car, or the greatest wealth, or the cleverest children. The desire to be recognised & to be important, is strong in some.

To these people, Jesus tells a story about the values of society being turned upside down and of people being recognised by a different set of criteria. Jesus envisages a society where people who are disabled, and on the edges of society will be given precedence because of need rather than privilege. This society is the Kingdom of God which is presented in Isaiah 25 as a huge banquet where all God's people have a party & rich & poor stand side by side, enjoying their life together as God's people.

Jesus words may sound a bit strange to us who have grown accustomed to people like politicians, company directors & others securing their own privileges. Yet there are spiritual implications to this behaviour. As with the Pharisees, the effort to secure privileges for ourselves often dulls our conscience regarding the powerless ones in society. Striving for status & recognition can isolate us from the people around us. "Privileges" are often seen as a right rather than as a gift.

Jesus story is not a lesson in social etiquette or humility. It is a radical shift where love, not privilege shapes the world. Jesus is saying there is a status that is granted by God rather than awarded by ourselves or by our society. God chooses to honour those who serve others, or who include others rather than shutting them out. God calls us to a life where we are one in Christ, & where we will recognise each other as brothers & sisters rather than as competitors.

I wonder if this idea of being recognised & important has influenced us as the church. I've heard some talk about churches in Bendigo being shaped from the beginning either as churches for the bosses & wealthy, or as churches for miners & workers. I imagine a lot of that has broken down over the years. If it hasn't we haven't been listening to the gospel.

Jesus story also affects those who don't think they count for much. When I read that story I found myself wondering – what would it mean for us if we put emphasis on the ones who don't count for much in this world? What would it mean for us if the church was to do what Jesus does and ask those who are not recognised much to step into the limelight. Would that change the way we think about each other in church & society? Might it help some people to use gifts they have not been using? Would it scare the daylights out of you if you were asked to step up a bit? I was just wondering.

One way Jesus story can affect us in the church is inviting people to our worship & groups. Our pastoral care need to be open and easy to enter. There are **still many people in society who think the church doesn't want them** – that the church will not accept them if they want to hold a wedding or funeral or something in

the church. Where & how people got that message I don't know, but we need to be active in being an inviting people rather than a restricting people.

This church helps to provide welfare assistance for people who don't have enough. Some families invite a low income person to share their Christmas dinner, or provide meals for someone who is ill. In church we welcome to the Communion table all baptised people regardless of age, race or denominational allegiance. These are important responses.

Jesus says in effect, if you keep seeking honour for yourselves you might forget that it is God who deserves to be honoured. If we try to make ourselves more, or less, important than others, we are responding more to the competition that goes on in society than we are to God. The good news is, we don't have to be like that. We are set free to let God's new life loose in the world.