



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 28 August 2022 – Trinity 11
Readings: Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16 & St Luke 14: 1, 7-14
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

The flaws of social etiquette

Social conventions change with the passage of time, don't they? We've probably moved on from greeting people by saying "How do you do?" With the same phrase parroted back by the other person. Social convention would certainly not expect a full and frank disclosure of how we are truly feeling. However, is "Hi, how are you?" Any different? After all we respond "I'm fine, thanks." But whether that is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth may be debatable. In Jesus' day, it would appear, that the seating at a wedding banquet was a bit of a free-for-all, with people jockeying for the best places. What a put-down to hear, Hurrumph! Actually, old chap, the seat you're occupying is needed for someone more distinguished than you!" Crimson-faced, you'd slink down the banqueting hall to the humble seats. Humility wasn't called, 'Eating humble pie', for nothing!

Today, if we're invited to a sit-down wedding reception, it's highly likely that as we entered the function room there'd be a seating plan on a board, we'd note our name and duly make our way over to the relevant table. We might realise that we'd just squeaked into the reception by the skin of our teeth noting our table is placed next to the door! Or, secretly grateful that we'd not been called up higher to sit next to deaf great-uncle Hubert who shouts at the top of his voice. Of course, what should be going through our minds is how gracious the family had been to invite us in the first place instead of someone else.

Turning social conventions on their head

At the Sabbath meal, the fact that Jesus is in speaking distance of his host, a Leader of the Pharisees, rather indicates that he has been accorded a seat of some distinction. However, the host's motives were far from gracious, as the gospel informs that the Pharisees 'were watching him closely'. The host does not have long to wait for Jesus to speak. He has no misgivings in telling his host that instead of inviting 'the Great and the Good' of his friends and wealthy neighbours, rather he should be reaching out to the impoverished, and those on the margins of society. After Jesus' challenge, the host was likely smarting every bit as much as those who may have been told to move to lesser places. However, as a leader of faith, Jesus infers that the host should be showing the better example.

The writer to the Hebrews does not massage his message either. It seems that the faith of the early Jewish converts to Christianity was faltering. He began by offering them a carrot inferring giving hospitality to strangers, might actually be offering hospitality to angels! Hoping that the proffered carrot had been well received the writer then reminded them not

to neglect those in prison of their own worshipping community, but rather to imagine themselves in their place, especially those enduring torture: most likely imprisoned for their faith. Next, he stated that Christians should have higher morals than society, for instance, marriage should be an honourable commitment not a lax arrangement permitting multiple sexual partners. Regarding possessions he warned them to keep their lives free from the love of money and to be content with what they had. Jesus, he illustrated never wavered, his standards were constant yesterday, today and for ever.

Using the parable of the wedding banquet Jesus drew his host's and guests' attention to the gulf between the haves and have nots and to imagine themselves in their position. By showing loving-kindness to those who were without, would offer a small degree of reciprocity for all the good gifts that they had received: then, they would be blessed because the poor could not repay them.

Engaging at a deeper level

We, in Guernsey, frequently receive requests to give to diverse charities supporting those with various needs and, we give according to our means. There is, however, a bigger message here than the obvious. Jesus had no money, the greatest gift that he gave us, was himself. Sometimes, what a person most needs is, the gift of our time rather than our talents. To see beneath the surface of the automatic comment, 'I'm fine, thanks', to imagine ourselves in their position and, to discern that the comment may hide grief or, soul-searching, frail health or, even, abuse either historic or current, that has been hidden from view out of polite adherence to social conventions.

The life of a disciple is, as Hebrews says, a calling to 'Mutual love'. To give with vulnerability, like Jesus, not knowing whether our concern will be welcome. However, by showing we care may give another person permission to unburden themselves. Sometimes that giving can be in the simplest of ways, a phone call to say, "Are you really, ok?" Doubtless, we all do these kindnesses without thinking about it. The greatest gift we can offer anyone is to help them find healing and wholeness, within the love of God, thereby honouring God's unconditional, overflowing love for us. Amen.