



This was an entrée to the reading from Luke 14, but Anne noted that though we couldn't always sit where we wanted to, in our church people did seem to have their favourite seats!

The reading from Luke was about Humility and Hospitality, and it was only after listening to the reading again that it occurred to Anne that when she invited round to her house it was people she knew well. She left it to us to feel that guilt as well.

Anne did wonder what Jesus was doing at a meal offered by a leading Pharisee, but once there He'd watched the behaviour and seized the opportunity to explain how different the rules of hospitality were in the kingdom of God. Our hospitality was almost always conditional. Guests were known to us and welcome in our house. According to Jesus, biblical hospitality meant welcoming into our houses and our lives the 'other', the one who was different from us, the stranger.

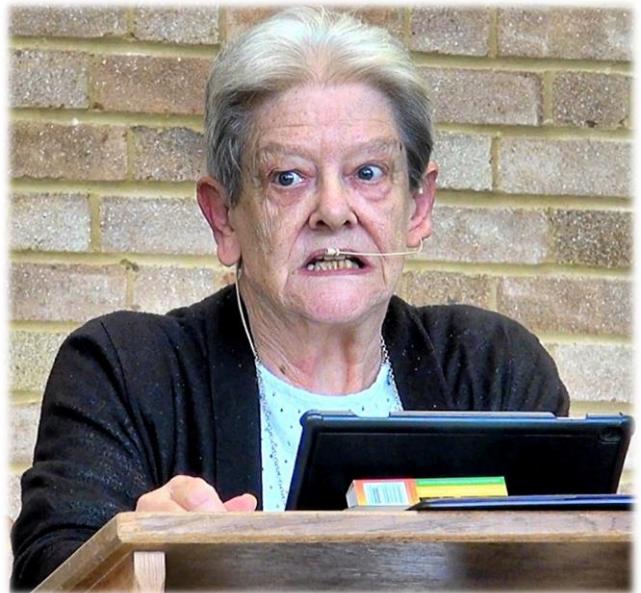
For Jesus, hospitality extended well beyond our friends, our family, or our neighbours. It was about welcoming people like the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame. Those who had no power or ability or resources to reciprocate. This 'Kingdom Hospitality' could leave us feeling a little bit vulnerable and at risk, for it told us to open the door, even before we knew who was on the other side. Anne felt Jesus wasn't asking us to be reckless with our own safety, or the safety of others.

To understand just how radical this teaching was for those at the Pharisees' table we needed to understand the social system at that time. Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, governed by the Roman class system. Wealth, birth, position, and citizenship determined where you fell within the social classes. There had been an intricate system of patronage, and favours had been the currency of the class system. The more favours that were owed to you as a benefactor, the higher you could rise socially.

Jesus had watched the guests at this Pharisee's house jockeying for good positions at the table and reminded them of the advice to be found in Proverbs, Chapter 25 - "When you stand before the king, don't try to impress him and pretend to be important, even if you are. It is better to be asked to take a higher position than to be told to give your place to someone more important" - and in a subtext, reminding them that they belonged to God, not to Rome!

Jesus had had absolutely no intention of letting the host off the hook either, making it very clear that he'd invited the wrong people and was therefore no better than his guests. He'd told him that he

It was only when I heard the story for the second time that I realised Anne was suffering from PTSD – **Post Traumatic Seating Disorder**. And we can all visualise that moment when, with bum (sic) hovering over a comfy chair on the first day of her teaching practice, a loud voice had intervened with, "Oh, you can't sit there! That's Miss So-and-so's chair!".



needed to stop trying to make himself look good, when in reality he was ignoring the people who should be enjoying his hospitality.

Jesus wanted us to understand that even treating others as our equal wasn't enough. Only true

humility could give us the right perspective on life. How often did we draw attention to what we were doing for God in an attempt to justify ourselves. We didn't need to justify ourselves before God as He had already justified us through the death and the resurrection of his Son.

Or maybe we were just trying to prove to others that we were good Christians. We wore our hyper-activity like a badge of honour, emphasising all the good works that we were doing for the Lord. Jesus said we didn't need to try to impress anyone with our righteousness. The only one whose opinion mattered was God. And he knew what was deep down in our hearts. He knew just how far we sometimes fell short of His righteousness.

Yet despite that, He still loved us anyway.

A big thank you to our organist Ronald Frazer, who'd come all the way from Morden to play for us.

And Anne had brought both Natalie and Debbie (*strictly it was Natalie who had done all the bringing*). Debbie is now a proud grandmother.



And finally great to have Stephen our caretaker visit us in church after his surgery.

(possibly explaining to Martin just how big the surgeons saw was?)