

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Wedding Feast

October 23, 2011

**Psalm 1 and Luke 14:7-11
(Hymns – 65, 29, 23, 30)**

It must have been quite the experience
to watch Jesus spar and spat with the Pharisees over dinner.

A lot of the parables are set in this context –
Jesus at dinner with a leading Pharisee in the district,
together with other distinguished guests from the local community.
We can imagine Jesus' disciples and followers
in the courtyard of the house,
perhaps with their own food and perhaps being served out the back door.

This was a society in which there were deep divisions -
economically, socially, religiously, racially, ethically.
There can be no doubt, reading both the Gospels and the Epistles,
that Jesus came to challenge those divisions
and invite all people into a new unity in him.
Those of us who take joy in being disciples of Jesus Christ,
who seek to learn what it means to flourish in his grace,
model that new unity.
They all human beings as our brothers and sisters in Christ.
They live with them as equals.
They care for them with compassion.

This is the law of the Lord as Jesus taught it.
Our joy as human beings, as Psalm 1 assures us,
is found in studying and obeying this way of life.

In the soul of this way of life
are the qualities of humility and hospitality.
Humility involves being focused on service rather than status.
Hospitality involves being focused on happiness rather than hostility.

I invite you this morning,
in this time of reflection on God's Word in Jesus Christ,
to pay attention with me to the theme of hospitality in this parable.

Offer hospitality, Jesus is saying, without thought of reward or repayment.
Offer hospitality, Jesus is saying, to those who need it most.

What might these aspects of the way of life modelled by Jesus Christ
mean for our witness, work, and growth
here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church?

The first dimension of hospitality
is the attitude that informs and infuses it.

For us at Brentwood Presbyterian,
as Cindy Johal reminded us so well last year in her Master's project research,
the foundational attitude
that sustains and shapes trust and collaboration in this community
is welcome.

When people were asked what led them to trust,
what led them to greater collaboration and contribution,
they said the welcome they first received when they came
and continued to receive as they became more involved.

That insight has helped to ground and focus our work and witness.

We strive, with the Holy Spirit's help, to be genuinely welcoming.
We strive, with the Holy Spirit's help, to be delighted to see you.
We strive, with the Holy Spirit's help, to prepare and offer a menu of experiences
that nourish every dimension of your being with the grace of Jesus Christ.

There *is* a challenge for us, however,
at least for me,
in this foundational attitude of our hospitality.

It's the part about welcoming without thought for the response,
without concern for people coming back and becoming involved.
We are a small congregation that is keen to grow.
Numbers are not the be all and end all of that growth,
but they are important in creating a sustainable future for this congregation.

So I found this aspect of the parable this morning a timely challenge for me.

The lesson I took from it was this:

*Pay attention to nourishing souls in the grace of Jesus Christ
as best you can with your colleagues at Brentwood
and leave the results up to the Holy Spirit.*

It's a tough lesson for someone like me,
who is so results oriented,
but it is a good lesson.

The second dimension of hospitality worth reflecting on this morning
is what follows the welcome,
the process of being a good host.
What does a good host do to follow up on the promise of the welcome?

Well, they are prepared.
They have anticipated most of their guest's needs,
though they are also adaptable
in meeting any needs that emerge in the moment.

Further, they make sure that their guests are engaged
in ways that make them feel comfortable.
They circulate and converse,
genuinely interested in their guests aspirations and passions.
They convene conversations about what matters most.

Further still, they make sure that their guests are well-fed.
They have carefully considered the menu,
the order of serving the nourishment,
the quality of the dishes,
the delight of the dining.

And finally, they are deeply grateful for their guests having come
and encourage them to come again.
The lives of the hosts have been enriched immeasurably
by the presence of the guests.
New ideas, new possibilities, new perspectives,
have emerged in the conversations.
The hosts, and hopefully the guests,
leave the feast as different people,
changed for the better by their experience.

That's the kind of experience of hospitality we strive to offer here at Brentwood.
Sunday after Sunday, we strive as your hosts to be prepared to engage you
in a rich feast of spiritual nourishment
that changes your life.

That's what the parables have been teaching us over this past year.
We trust we have been good students.