

WDP19-Bible Studies

Luke 14:15-24; Isaiah 25: 6–9; 1 Corinthians 11: 23–29

Our Bible studies this year are all accounts of meals. Luke - the parable of the great dinner; Isaiah - the feast at the end of time when death will be destroyed and God's Kingdom will become a total reality; 1 Corinthians - the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist. All of them are about meals that God has prepared for his people, and the big question is - how do we respond to God's invitation to come and eat? Are we eager to accept? Do we make excuses to stay at home? Do we say yes, and then fail to properly prepare for the occasion? All three passages ask us to consider and reflect on these questions.

Reflecting on Luke

Jesus Christ - who is the greatest of all - said that we should first invite the poor to sit at the table of the great banquet. That is the only way to bring about that radical breakthrough into God's grace. This breakthrough is like conversion, a radical change. Our response to this conversion can be spoken of in terms of our new relationship with our neighbours. In this relationship, care and mutual acceptance reflect God's love where there is no place for discrimination. We all receive God's grace unconditionally. There is no place for attitudes of pride or hierarchies of importance. Jesus demonstrates God's prodigal generosity through this wonderfully bountiful table laden with choice foods intended to feed and nourish humankind. Here is the food, here is the bread with which God fills us, builds us up and renews us in his image. The people in this story have no idea why they have been invited so unexpectedly to this banquet. The Good News comes to us when we are not looking for it, unexpectedly, which is why it keeps surprising us. The heart of God's insistent invitation lies in inviting a person to do something which is not just a matter of course. We are all invited to the feast, but this invitation demands a response from us. Our mission lies in inviting others to feast on God's Word.

In most Bible translations, the verb used in verse 23 disturbs people. The verb "compel" used in this extract comes from the Greek word "*anagkástos*", which means forcefully, urgently. The Greek verb "*anagkázō*" (to oblige, force, invite compellingly) means to persevere in offering hospitality. This is a metaphor for the kind of insistent hospitality which won't accept a "no"!

This passage from Luke's Gospel emphasises that we as Christians must not cease from acts of radical hospitality. Jesus wants us to be lovingly insistent. And that insistence is the call of God's love. We don't take "no" for an answer. We don't use force, but on the other hand we cannot be indifferent to our neighbour and so we keep on inviting 'until the house is filled'. There is still space at the table, let's go to the streets and say 'Come - everything is ready.'

In Jesus' time it was customary to invite guests to a feast on a particular day without specifying a time, the time being specified when the feast was prepared. So the guests knew in advance that "this was the day" of the banquet in the Kingdom of God.

Reflection Pointers

- Imagine that you are one of the original guests in the parable who refused to come. Having reached the house you find it full of people who are complete strangers to you: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind (Luke 14:13). Who would those be in your community? Would you want to be allowed in to enjoy their company?
- We believe those outside the city were the foreigners, non-Jews. There were other

occasions when Jesus interacted with non-Jews. Can you remember any of them?

- What do you think Jesus was trying to say to the man who had said: Blessed are those who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God? Why?
- Imagine that you were one of those invited off the streets. How would you feel about the unexpected invitation? How would it feel for you to sit at the table of the Kingdom of God?
- Read silently the parable in Luke 14:15-24 and ask yourself whom you would encourage to come in if you were the messenger sent out to find new guests. Would you invite the homeless, the beggars, the street children...?

Reflecting on Isaiah

The Jewish temple worship included a fire, a priest, slaughtering of animals and preparation for prayers. The Temple worship represented a communion with God. The prophet Isaiah speaks of God preparing a banquet on the mountain for all people, at which the veil around the people would be torn asunder. Death would be destroyed, and God's kingdom will come. A banquet is a celebration. To the Jews, a shared meal was something very personal, intimate, an act of friendship, and a place of bonding with people. "To share a meal with someone" signified for a Jew "being one with them" and "uniting with them".

Reflecting on 1 Corinthians

The first Christians shared meals. We could say that 1 Corinthians 11 is a concrete realisation of the great dinner in Luke's Gospel. In that passage we can see a foretaste of what Jesus is going to do - it is He who will serve at the banquet and give his body and blood. Paul speaks of the Eucharistic Meal and shows us, theologically, that we are already participating in the messianic feast, which is a sacrificial meal. And by sharing the meal we all share in this sacrifice. Therefore, new relationships between people must prevail at this banquet - and in this way the Kingdom of God is made present. Paul is quite clear about the way this particular meal should be approached, and it would appear that the Corinthians weren't up to his standards. Are we?

Reflection pointers

- God is inviting us to His feast. We too can be good at finding excuses for turning him down. Ask yourself about your excuses and how you can come to God's table, which is open to all.
- Jesus announced the Good News of God's Kingdom by sharing meals with people, including the ones marginalised in his time. In Jewish society, and for many others even today, sharing a meal with someone is a way of "being one with them". Who are you having meals with? Is your table open for others?

Continue to Pray for

- refugees who have lost everything and are looking for peace
- elderly people who do not receive the care and attention they need and who feel isolated and lonely
- those whose face social exclusion – ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those seeking asylum