**Holy habits – Eating Together: Week 8**

Quite often for this topic we look at meals Jesus shared. This week, however, we are looking at a meal Jesus imagined: the Parable of the Great Feast (Luke chapter 14 verses 15-24), also called the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew chapter 22 verses 1-14). I guess that few of us have attended a great feast or a genuine banquet this year. For most of us, I guess that the most important meal of the year, and quite possibly the biggest meal of the year, will be in two days’ time: Christmas dinner. Does the parable of Jesus relate in any way at all to our imminent Great Feast?

Jesus says nothing about who cooked the meal and who did the washing up. I suppose that the host, particularly if he is a king as in Matthew’s account, is unlikely to have done either of these jobs himself, especially as both accounts mention servants. In the story of Martha and Mary (Luke chapter 10 verses 38-42) Jesus recognises that the person who does the work around the house often goes unrecognised. It does not follow that the work is unappreciated. Mary’s need to hear Jesus speaking is the most important thing for all of us to be doing, but I am certain that Jesus would also have recognised Martha’s service and thanked her for it. Luke chooses not to include this in the account, but we must make sure that we do not fail to show full and proper appreciation to those who bring us our Great Feast on Wednesday, and clear up after it.

What Jesus does say in the Parable is that not everyone turned up, giving excuses of varying value. The people who did come were the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame from the streets and alleys of the town. Who will we be sharing our Great Feast with? Some will doubtless be missing for very good reasons, but there may be others missing because our relationship with them has been broken. One of the hardest things that Jesus teaches is that we should forgive, whether the other person deserves it or not. He told Peter to forgive his brother’s sins 70 x 7 times without any expectation of him saying sorry (Matthew chapter 18 verses 21-22). If someone steals our coat, we are to give them our shirt, and turn the other cheek to be slapped as well (Luke chapter 6 verse 29). Is there still time before Wednesday to say sorry and invite them along? If not, let us resolve that they will not be missing for Christmas 2020.

Is Jesus expecting us to invite strangers to our Great Feast on Wednesday? At our first Christmas Day service at Bents Green in 1974, Anne and I did not know very well the person sitting in front of us, but at the end of the service he turned round and said that if we were by ourselves that day, would we like to join him and his family for Christmas dinner? As it happened we were with family for Christmas, but we were touched by Geoff Tattersall’s kindness, and still remember it 45 years later. If we get the opportunity to be equally kind, may God give us the grace to do so. And what every one of us should do on Christmas Day is to remember that there will be many people not able to enjoy a Great Feast for all sorts of reasons. Although we may not be able to do much on Christmas Day itself, we have 366 days (it is a leap year) to make sure that by our next Great Feast we have given money or done something practical to help the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame from the streets and alleys of Sheffield to enjoy Christmas Day 2020.

Finally, the Parable is of course about the Great Feast in the kingdom of heaven, to which Jesus invites each one of us. Let us say Yes to Him this Christmas Day, and be able to look forward to the Greatest of all Feasts.

*Produced by Glenn Evans on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*