

Practicing Radical Hospitality

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are worshipping in "ordinary time". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Gathering

Whether you come feeling confident, or whether you come with some apprehension - you are welcome.

Jesus' invitation is for everyone - rich or poor; able-bodied or struggling with injury, disability or aching bones; respectable or over-looked - everyone, everyone is welcome! You are welcome!



Light Candle

We light the candle - focussing our attention, allowing ourselves to be drawn to its flame. We look to Jesus, the light of the world, a light that shines even in the darkest of times offering hope and healing.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, breathed life into this Land and her Peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

From river to ocean
from campfire to hearth

may the First Nations who have cared for this land be blessed.

From breath to song
from step to dance

***may those who follow your Songlines
guide us on the journey to living honourably in this place.***

From greeting to Amen
from silence to chorus

may our worship join with the voices of the First Nations of this Land.

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Call to Worship

Hebrews 13:1-12:

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Let us pray...

God of Grace,

you draw us together in this place:

to hear your Word;

to offer our joys and concerns;

to celebrate who you are and who you call us to be.

Spirit of Life, breathe your spirit of hope and love amongst us now as we come to worship you. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Sing - All Are Welcome

We sing a hymn of welcome - may we live into the vision this hymn presents to us...

Let us build a house where love can dwell

and all can safely live,

a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

rock of faith and vault of grace;

here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,

and words are strong and true,

where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

and as symbol of God's grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:

a banquet hall on holy ground

where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,

is revealed in time and space;

as we share in Christ the feast that

frees us: *All are welcome...*

Let us build a house where hands will reach

beyond the wood and stone

to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,

and love the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger

bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome...

Let us build a house where all are named,

their songs and visions heard

and loved and treasured, taught and claimed

as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,

prayers of faith and songs of grace,

let this house proclaim from floor to

rafter: *All are welcome...*

Prayer - based on Psalm 81

- 1 Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
- 2 Raise a song, sound the tambourine,
the sweet lyre with the harp.
- 3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day.
- 4 For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5 He made it a decree in Joseph,
when he went out over the land of Egypt.

God our strength,
we gather here this morning, praising you for the gift of a new day,
the breath we breathe
the sun and rain and wind that nurture the soil that grows the food we eat;
we gather here rejoicing in the friendships and community we share together here,
may the praise on our lips reflect the joy in our hearts for you and the abundance of love
and care you shower on us.

- I hear a voice I had not known:
- 6 'I relieved your shoulder of the burden;
your hands were freed from the basket.
 - 7 In distress you called, and I rescued you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

Selah

God our saviour,
so often we find ourselves embedded deeply into a hole we have dug for ourselves,
or carrying far more than our bodies or minds or hearts can bear,
and as we cry out in our distress, you come to us
offering a still small voice of reassurance
and life-restoring, life-giving waters of healing and hope.

- 8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you;
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
- 9 There shall be no strange god among you;
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
- 10 I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

God, our God,
forgive us when we get so caught up in ourselves that we miss the life to which you are
calling us;
forgive us when we are distracted by the lure of money and security and our need to keep
up with the fashions and expectations of the world around us;
forgive us when we forget that you have promised to provide all that we need and so go
looking for satisfaction and fulfilment in other places.

- 11 'But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.
- 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,

- to follow their own counsels.
- ¹³ O that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
- ¹⁴ Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,
and turn my hand against their foes.
- ¹⁵ Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,
and their doom would last for ever.

Parent God,
soften our hearts and open our ears and our minds to respond to your way of love and grace in the world;
drag us out of the pit we dig for ourselves or the darkness we enshroud ourselves in; and help us to commit once more to your way in the world - a way of peace and justice and love without bounds, a way that honours you and reflects the way of Jesus Christ, your son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Affirmation

- ¹⁶ I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.'

As we turn towards our Creator,
as we shape our lives in the love of Jesus the Christ,
as we are led and guided by the moving of the Holy Spirit,
so we are fed and filled with the sweetness of life in all its fulness.
Thanks be to God!

Sing - Here In This Place (TIS 474)

And so we sing a song recognising that no matter where we have come from, God gathers us in the light of a new day, a new way...

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

Here we will take of wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
call us anew to be salt of the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery;
we are the old, who yearn for your face;
we have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty,
gather us in, the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven light years away,
but here in this space, the new light is shining,
now is the kingdom, now is the day.
Gather us in, and hold us forever;
gather us in, and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Luke 14:1-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. ²Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?' ⁴But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵Then he said to them, 'If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?' ⁶And they could not reply to this.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable.

⁸'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

¹² He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Generous God,
open our hearts to accept your invitation to true community in your kingdom.
Assure us of our place at your open table, and help us to make sure that no-one is excluded from dining with you. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 28 August 2022, p.146

When you came in this morning, what went through your mind?

Anything like:

Oh no, everything has moved so I can't sit in my favourite seat?!

Or - yay, it is all different so now where is the best seat where there is least discomfort for me?

Or - my goodness, it is all new and there is too much choice and I feel a bit overwhelmed so I will just go and sit in what looks like a quiet corner?

Or - where are my friends, the people I feel most comfortable with?

All perfectly understandable and possibly reasonable responses - but are they responses that align with what Jesus is saying in Luke 14?

Jesus has been invited to dinner.

Despite him having offended the religious leaders when he healed an old woman in the temple on the sabbath, here is one religious leader who is not yet ready to dismiss him, who is still curious enough to invite him to dinner. Or, at least, is willing to invite Jesus to dinner so that they can keep an eye on him (14:1).

And in case we missed what happened in the temple last sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), it seems the writer of Luke's gospel feels the need to reinforce the point. Again here, it is the sabbath, and someone comes to him hoping to be healed. Jesus, again, points out that if people are willing to care for their animals on the sabbath, then how much more should we attend to the needs of God's precious children.

And then, as the dinner party begins, Jesus watches what is going on.

And then he speaks - offering some advice to both the other guests (14:8-11) and the host (14:12-14).

The first thing to remember is that for the society in which Jesus lived, offering hospitality was a deeply held cultural value. When God first drew the people of Hebrew to Godself, God had instructed them to welcome the stranger, to offer hospitality to the stranger.

When the writer to the Hebrews reinforces the teaching about hospitality:

"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:1-2),

the writer does so by referring to the story of Abraham unknowingly entertaining God's messengers when they were sent to Abraham and Sarah to announce the coming birth of their son (Genesis 18) [- remember? Sarah laughed].

But the question becomes, what does this hospitality look like?

Jesus responds to that question by offering us something to ponder both as guest and host:

As a guest, where do we place ourselves in terms of honourability?

And as a host, who do we invite to our tables, or into our inner circles?

And it is Jesus' teaching here, that some now describe as "radical hospitality" - hospitality that is fundamentally different to the way our society accepts as normal.

First it insists that we never expect the place of honour.

That's not to say we don't value ourselves or know our own intrinsic value in the love and grace of our Creator. Jesus is clear that each one of us is a beloved, valued child of God. But in a world that creates hierarchies, we are not to assume that we are the most important person in the room. Rather, we place ourselves alongside and with everyone else - not "lording it over" anyone, or self-promoting.

And then, reinforcing his point from another angle, Jesus invites us to consider hospitality from the point of view of the host. The hospitality of God's kingdom, God's way, challenges expectations of reciprocity and reward - it includes people who can't repay, and people who are often excluded from public life - whether by physical capacity or disability or by social class (prisoners, refugees etc). Remember, this was a society where people with a disability or illness were excluded from society and even from their religious communities - but Jesus says *these* are the people that should be invited to dinner.

The problem for the religious leaders, and the "proper people" of his time is that this kind of hospitality is disruptive. It challenged the social and religious norms of the day and offered space to people who were powerless and voiceless.

So what about us?

Chris Hege in his blog, "There is Just Us", suggests that:
"Hospitality is not simply a practice. It is a spiritual discipline as we follow Jesus [and seek to become more like him]."

<https://www.thereisjustus.com/blog/radical-hospitality/>

Which means that it likely involves some effort on our part - not just in terms of making a nice meal or morning tea, but in terms of offering something of ourselves for the sake of enabling another to be welcomed and embraced.

So what does that look like for us?

I mean, we live in a society where we like to think that we are egalitarian and everyone can come along - but is that really the case? We like to think we are inclusive of all peoples, but are we?

Ryan Dunn of the United Methodist Church in the US offers this:

"As an adjective, "radical" means "to affect the fundamental nature of something." So offering hospitality in a radical way means offering hospitality in a fundamentally different way.

As a disruption to cycles of brokenness, radical hospitality requires a fundamental shift from a simple practice of offering welcome to an outward movement *to stand with others* - particularly those who are at society's margins..." [my emphasis]

And so we might think not just about who we invite - but how we behave when the invitation is accepted. Do we expect that people will behave like we do? Do we expect people to believe what we do? How do we engage with difference? How do we make our spaces welcoming to people who are new to the space? Are prepared to make changes to when we meet, or the way we meet, in order to make it easier for others to participate?

Ryan Dunn goes on...:

Here's what stands out about radical hospitality: we let go of a need to shape people into our own image. We extend radical hospitality when we include people within a community without an expectation that they will fully conform to it. We may even concede some of our community identity in order to be more hospitable to those who we welcome. Radical hospitality sends a message beyond, "you are welcome to join us." It says, "We see you and want to join you, wherever you are." In short, radical hospitality doesn't just ask "do you want to be with us?" It says "how can we be with you?"

Because this is what God does. In Jesus, the God who created the universe, shows up in human history, enters *our* experience of the world. God enters *our* story rather than demanding that we enter God's story. And maybe that's what radical hospitality is about - when we say, "I want to become a part of your story more than I hope you will become a part of mine."

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/what-is-radical-hospitality>

But there is a caveat - isn't there? What happens if your guest is rude or seemingly ungracious? I mean, even Jesus was known to upset his hosts from time to time.

Perhaps there are assumptions made that we don't realise or don't agree with.

Perhaps there will be behaviour or beliefs that don't sit well with us.

And so we need to learn to negotiate with grace, good humour, and love - always with God's way of love, justice and reconciliation at the centre of our being.

So some questions to leave you with:

Who is gathering around your table - for a meal, for a coffee, at Bible Study - and are there people in our community who are overlooked or excluded?

Are there changes we need to make in order to ensure people feel safe and included in our gatherings?

How might we check our expectations of each other and negotiate when expectations differ?

O God,
give us eyes to see the people around us,
family, friends, others
and help us to see beyond their faces into their lives,
to walk in their shoes and really see them as you do.
For you see each human as your beloved child,
you have hopes and dreams for them and wish them to know you.
Lord, who are these people to us,
who are we to them?
Do we treat them the same?
Do we see you in them?
Lord, teach us to see as you do,
to love each person and to treat each one as we would like to be treated.
May our generosity of spirit grow and grow as we learn to be loving and caring as you are.
Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 43, resources for 28 August 2022, p.105

Responding

Sing - For Everyone Born, A Place At The Table (Seasons 4-14)

This song, written by Shirley Murray, is a celebration of God's hospitality, a picture of the space we are invited to create in Christ's name.

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for
growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,
*and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!*

For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair,
and God will delight...

For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are
wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong,
and God will delight...

For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live,
and God will delight...

For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and
worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free,
and God will delight...

*Shirley Erena Murray
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Prayer for Others (Meredith Yabsley)
(inspired by Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16, Luke 14: 7-14)

Gracious God,
You are a God of hospitality;
there is none like you that invites all to come to you.
You have invited all to your home, to your table, and to your arms.
Lord, would that all would hear and receive this good news.
Lord, help us to remember
that no one is better than anyone else in your Kingdom.
Help us to then treat each other the way you treat people.

Generous God,
Because you treat us with your tender love,
We take time to pray for our friends, family members
and others who need you more than ever.
Pour out your healing on all who need it.
Be generous with your transforming love
for those who needs it in their lives.
Bring forth your reconciliation in families,
and in places where it is needed.

Gifting God,
You give us the gifts of the spirit to use to further your Kingdom
and to be the Body of Christ in the world.
We take time to think of the people devastated by war and unrest.
We think of the people of Ukraine, of Thailand, of Afghanistan, of Somalia,
of Taiwan, of Yemen.
We think of those who are affected by violence and unrest in their homes and in their
communities.
and we thank you for the restoration that has already taken place.
Empower us to continue to be your hands and feet
to continue the work that needs to be done there
and in so many other places.

There is none like you God in your love, your generosity,
your gifting and your hospitality.
And we thank you that you are in our lives,
working in us and through us
to let people know your kingdom is open to all.
In the name of your Son, who opened the doors for all
and broke down barriers that kept people from you, Amen.

Adapted from a prayer written by Rev Abi, and posted on Rev Abi's Long and Winding Road blog.

Sing - Come To The Banquet (Seasons 2-11)

And so we sing our invitation to this table where there is a place for you...

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Though you maybe have no money,
though you maybe feel unworthy,
in your strength or in your weakness
you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

See, you are an honoured guest,
from constant serving you may rest;
so sit you down, be fed and blessed,
for you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Woman, wise one, mother, maiden,
see your plate with food is laden
and your place is set and waiting.
You are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Worker, father, little boy,
old man or youth without employ, come
rest your worry, here is joy,
and you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Whether you've been lost or faithful,
whether you've been wise or wasteful,
here's a place of rest and grace,
and you are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Here is one who runs to meet you,
loving arms stretched out to greet you.
Do not let your fear defeat you.
You are welcome, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Willing hands have made this bread
with yeast and salt and labour shared.
Let all the hungry ones be fed.
It's time for feasting, come.

Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

Abundant wine, enough for all!
Our generous, loving host has called.
The cup of blessing now is poured
for sweet communion, come.
Come to the banquet, there's a place for you.

© Fay White

Holy Communion

If you would like to share in Communion and are unable to join with us in-person, please let Rev Kath or Rhonda Back know. We would love to bring Communion to you in your home at a time that suits you.

Offering

We make space now to think about what we have heard and seen today and consider our response.

As we make our offering - we remember again that this is not just about money - either here in the plate or through a bank transfer - this is also about how we are generous with our time and energy and gifts; and about how we resolve to live differently because we have encountered the living Christ.

And if this is your first time with us or if you are visiting, please don't feel obliged to give.

You are our guests, and we want you simply to enjoy the blessings of worshiping together. We are glad you are here!

Let us pray...
Generous God,
we bring our offerings before you and lay them on your table.
We offer them for the work of your kingdom
and for the local and global church.
May our offerings be a symbol of our very selves which we also offer anew today.
Lord, help us to use our time and talents wisely and humbly in service to you.
May we find ways to engage with all humanity using what we have. Amen.

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Sending

Sing - Let Us Talents And Tongues Employ (TIS 537)

We go singing our commitment to utilise all that we have and all that we are to build a community that practices radical hospitality.

Let us talents and tongues employ,
reaching out with a shout of joy;
bread is broken, the wine is poured,
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,
at the table he sets the tone,
teaching people to live to bless,
love in word and in deed express.

Jesus lives again...

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God-Immanuel everywhere.

Jesus lives again...

© Frederick Herman Kaan

Sending and Blessing

Let mutual love continue.

Share your tables with everyone - and you will encounter God's messengers.
And keep your eyes and ears and hearts open to the surprises God reveals to you.

As you go from here,

be blessed in the name of our Creator whose vision for a better world stretches before us.
be blessed in the name of our Redeemer, who embodied that vision,
and be blessed in the name of the Spirit who breathes new life through us now and sends us into the world to continue the work of growing God's vision in our community.

Rev Kath Merrifield
28 August 2022