

What do you bring to the table?

At the PCC Tonight training event last Thursday we were given a list of top tips how to run a good meeting and the first of these included putting Christ central to the occasion, praying worshipping and inviting Jesus to be at the heart of what we do. We were reminded that in the Jewish tradition, a spare seat is left at the table in readiness for the return of the Messiah, which was thought to be when Elijah returns. And in Mike Lloyd's excellent book entitled Café Theology he reminds the reader that saying Grace before a meal helps the diner remember that every day is a gift from God and that all food is provided by his grace and bounty.

I wonder, do you say grace

before meals – it's a helpful practice to develop a spirit of gratitude and an awareness that Jesus is in our midst whether or not we acknowledge his presence. I wonder how transformed gatherings might be if we retained the perspective that Jesus was amongst us and that our hospitality and conduct to one another was observed by him?

In today's gospel, Simon the Pharisee hosts

a meal as was the practice when a visiting Rabbi was in town. Anyone was able to come into the courtyard and participate in the occasion although not everyone was welcome.

When a guest entered the house three things were always done: the host gave a kiss of peace, feet were washed with water and incense was burned or a drop of attar of roses was placed on the guest's head.

Guests did not sit

but reclined on their left leaving their right hand free. This explains how the woman stood behind Jesus and washed his feet.

Why does Simon invite Jesus into his home?

1. He might have been an admirer for not all Pharisees were Jesus' enemies (cf 13:31 At that hour some Pharisees came to Jesus. "Depart," they said to him, "and get on your way from this place, because Herod is out to kill you."), or;
2. Simon might have wanted to entice Jesus into some word or action which would be used against him at his trial. However, in 7:40 Simon

refers to Jesus as rabbi indicating a level of respect. Or,

3. He was a collector of celebrities and with a half-patronising contempt he had invited this startling young Galilean to have a meal with him – this seems most likely given the strange combination of a certain respect with the omission of the usual courtesies.

Paying careful attention to detail reaps dividends.

What do we notice, what do we pay attention to and what drives that? We are motivated by pressures and demands on our time and all of us are answerable to others in some capacity. St Luke calls us to pay attention to our own sinfulness and attitude to the need for forgiveness.

On desert island discs

this Friday David Nott described the realities of life as a surgeon on the front line in Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Having noticed and responded to the scenes on TV of appalling suffering and deprivation he was moved to act and risked his own life to treat others whose very lives and bodies were torn apart by war.

On one occasion

he was operating on man who turned out to be an Isil fighter and before long the operating theatre was occupied by six others fighters with AK47s pointing in David's direction. His colleague noticed who they were and he was terrified David might be spotted as Christian. So his colleague informed the group that the surgeon would not speak and was not to be interrupted. David Nott went on to save the life of the Isil fighter. He explained that a life is a life of equal worth in the sight of God and this man might one day learn that a Christian had saved his life. Even though he might go on to fight another day, only God knows his future and the direction of his life which might be changed for the better as a result of this operation. How much love might a reformed Isil fighter have towards those who had saved his life on the operating table or come into a living relationship with the God whom David Nott worships?

Returning from the front line

having responded in great love David suffers PTSD regularly and on one occasion was at the Queen's for lunch shortly afternoon returning from one such overseas mission. When it was his turn to speak with

her Her Majesty, David realised he was at a loss for words. Out of compassion and paying attention to his condition she asked if she could help and so asked the courtiers to bring over a tin which contained dog biscuits and for the next twenty minutes David and The Queen simply fed the corgis. Both had paid careful attention, both had shown love and used their resources to help someone in need without judgement. The power of hospitality is huge and speaks a universal language of love down the ages.

[This lunch time there is an opportunity](#)

to enjoy good refreshments, collective hospitality, gratitude and unity by bringing a picnic to the lawn in front of St Francis to celebrate the birthday of the Queen. Whatever your views about royalty it is widely recognised that Christianity lies at the heart of Her Majesty's many decades of tireless service to her country.

[On Thursday I went to the Parish Lunch](#)

and was once again struck by the love that is extended in the act of providing a meal. Preparations begin on a Tuesday with a delivery of 5kilo of carrots and half a sack of potatoes – these are then peeled

over two hours on a Wednesday morning by one man. More perishable veg is then delivered on a Wednesday and the main shopping takes place on Thursday morning. A busy day begins at 8 and ends at 3 and many of the helpers are older than the diners. It's truly a tremendous ministry.

[Returning to the training event on PCCs,](#)

we learnt from James Lawrence just how much he sees in his travels around the country of the amazing work that is done by the church week by week which never reaches the headlines. Debt relief, food banks – a massive army of volunteers and that the church is bigger than any other volunteer sector in the country bringing the good news of God's kingdom to thousands of marginalised people.

[Of the list of top tips for a great PCC](#)

was the research-based finding that great refreshments have positive effect on the quality of decision making.

[What's the quality of our hospitality,](#)

how much do we notice the need of the individual?

Jesus is not offered true hospitality

by the well-connected Pharisee but by the woman of lowly status.

There is a great irony

in the fact that Simon and the other guests mutter to themselves about who does Jesus think he is – Simon concludes this can't be a prophet or he'd know what the woman is really like- a prostitute and a sinner. Jesus demonstrates that not only does he know what she is but he reads the Pharisee's mind a demonstrates his skill in prophecy by speaking of God, the main function of a prophet and also addressing head on the lack of hospitality demonstrated by Simon and by extension the lack of love.

Here St Luke is painting

another picture and we can be drawn easily to the various characters – I wonder which you find yourself drawn towards.

The story demonstrates a contrast

between two attitudes of heart and mind – Simon was convinced he was a good man and therefore in no need of forgiveness – the woman was aware of

nothing else and was therefore overwhelmed with love for him who could supply forgiveness. There is a strand running through this narrative of right judgement, correct discerning what is truth and this seems in plain sight to the prostitute and hidden from the sight of the Pharisee and his guests.

Here's a strange paradox, a contradiction;

the more we offer hospitality to Jesus in our home in our working life in our very inner being, as God abides in us the more aware of our sinfulness we become. The more sin we notice the greater our appreciation of forgiveness. The greater our forgiveness the more Christ like we become. And the more Christ like we become the more of his love and hospitality we will show. So, someone who might appear to the world as holy, will more than likely be acutely aware of their weaknesses. Pope Francis on appointment to the pontificate responded by saying I am a very sinful man and St Paul describes himself as the worst of sinners. St Francis said

Jesus notices, stops and pays attention,

like last week's reading when Jesus interrupts his world-saving ministry to heal the widow's son. In fact,

the power of the detail and the apparently insignificant is precisely significant because it is small in the eyes of the world. The fact that Jesus cares for beloved slaves of centurions, for sons of widows and here for prostitutes, points onlookers beyond his words and actions and right to the heart of the gospel the in-breaking kingdom of God.

[There is freedom and relief in forgiveness,](#)

release from guilt and shame. What was the woman in the reading crying about – perhaps it was guilt perhaps fear perhaps relief that she was able to anoint the messiah, she felt the weight of her life of sin and centred her attention not on anyone but Jesus. Letting her hair down in public was a shameful act yet she cared nothing except to serve her Lord. What an example to follow.

[Surely saving the life of an Isil fighter](#)

is akin to seemingly foolishness of the kingdom of God, it turns hatred into compassion, it shows what impact the radical offensive crazy gospel can have. Who do we view like Simon viewed the prostitute and how do we see our own need for forgiveness.

Trajectory, heart turned towards a God of radical love and hospitality to the marginalised and the sinner.

What do we bring to the table?

– an operating table, a coffee table, or today's communion table. We might bring our vulnerability, our hopes or fears, our pride, our self-righteousness, our guilt and shame. Whatever we bring to the table, Jesus brings himself and in doing so we are able to put our faith not in our own standing with God but in the saving work of Jesus risen ascended and glorified.

Amen