

## **Sermon 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity 2016**

We say pride goes before a fall and that is certainly what Jesus is trying to tell the guests at this dinner party. But of course it is about so much more than that. Israel cannot count upon being the top guest at the heavenly banquet any more than many Christians can who think their good deeds and standing in Christian hierarchies can.

Of course we have all encountered proud parents with a starry look in their eyes at the antics of their beloved offspring, we have all tried to avoid those who go on continuously and repetitively of said offspring's achievements; or the person who continually boasts about the famous people they know. We have all felt the pride of a task completed and completed well, and even Vicars' heads can get swollen at the repeated "nice sermon today Vicar" as people leave church! As an aside; sermons shouldn't really be 'nice'.

We are warned in the reading from Ecclesiasticus that 'The beginning of human

pride is to forsake the Lord' because without him we can do nothing, are nothing, will not be invited to that heavenly feast. We are where we are through God's grace, all that we have, all our talents and gifts are from God. We cannot earn God's approval or love by deeds, especially by deeds done to try to impress. God is not impressed unless things are done from the heart.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds us of this, that we should always be trying to put ourselves in others' shoes. We should not be judgemental or superior or disdainful but respecting others, loving and honouring others. God will not be won over by earthly riches or positions of superiority, he is concerned about where our heart is.

Our hearts should be looking and giving outwards, loving our God, loving his people and all his creation. Loving those who are different, not just those who are like us, who share our tastes, views and behaviours.

We can, and should, have pride in the cross of Jesus which is our salvation as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, and in his letters he continually reminds his readers that God knows and cares about what is in our hearts, not how other people perceive us. If God searched our hearts today, what would he find? Are we measuring ourselves by earthly standards or heavenly standards?

God turns the standards and values of the world upside down. The King of all is crucified in shame. The last shall be first and the first shall be least says Jesus. We cannot think that we 'deserve' a place at the banquet in heaven, nor think how we can ensure that place. Would you be happy to see the street beggar sitting higher up the table than you? The jobless immigrant sitting next to you?

Jane Williams suggests that we should be trying to ensure that everyone gets invited, and to understand that because others are invited our invitation is not devalued. Anyone who has helped to plan a wedding banquet on earth will

know how difficult a seating plan is and how sensitive people are about their 'rights' to a certain place. This is not the heavenly way and we must set aside such feelings, we are all there through God's grace and we cannot query his decisions. And so today we are asked to set aside our earthly pride, our earthly values and see others through God's eyes. To help ensure that everyone gets to the heavenly banquet and not try to ensure our place high up the table in dressed in our best bib and tucker.

George Herbert write of God's love and grace eloquently:

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin. But quick eyed Love,  
Observing me grow slack From my first entrance  
in, drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning if I  
lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:' Love  
said, 'You shall be he.' 'I, the unkind, ungrateful?  
Ah, my dear I cannot look on Thee.' Love took  
my hand and smiling did reply, 'Who made the  
eyes but?'

'Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame go where it doth deserve.' 'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bears the blame?' 'My dear, then I will serve.' 'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.' 'So I did sit and eat.'