

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 31 August 2025 - The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Ecclesiasticus 10.12–18; or Proverbs 25.6–7; Psalm 112; Hebrews 13.1–8, 15–16; Luke 14.1, 7–14

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Devin McLachlan, Bishop's Advisor for Inter-Faith and Incumbent Vicar, St Benedict, Cambridge

Today's Gospel brings to mind an old Middle Eastern folktale. It's a story about Nasradin Hoja [*"Nas-rah-din Hoe-jah"*]. Hoja was a famous storyteller and wanderer, maybe from Turkey, maybe from Persia — a bit of a holy fool as ready to make fun of himself as he is to make fun of the rich and powerful. One day Hoja shows up at a wedding banquet. He's in his most ragged, patched and tattered travelling clothes — more dirt than cloth in most places, and even the dirt is worn and fusty. The steward at the door sees this scruffy old vagabond come into the wedding banquet and the steward's first thought is turn this old man away... But, as it used to be in England, you don't turn anyone away from the wedding feast. Very bad luck indeed. However, you don't sit everyone up at High Table with the bride and groom either. So Hoja was given a chipped pottery bowl with a bit of lentil stew which might have been somewhere near the roast lamb, but only as a passing acquaintance, and sent to sit in the far, darkest corner of the hall.

'Harumph,' Hoja says to himself. 'This won't do at all.' And he gets up and heads back to his inn, opens his luggage, and pulls out a sumptuous silk robe, midnight black and sky blue, embroidered with gold and sparkling with rubies and topaz. He wraps an enormous silk kaftan around his head and returns to the wedding banquet.

'Your eminence! Your grace! Your kind magnificence!' the Steward sputters. 'Welcome! Welcome! Come, sit at the bridegroom's right hand, here at High Table!'

Hoja follows the Steward up to the high table, to the empty chair awaiting him as an unexpected guest of honour.

Then Hoja removes his robe and sets it on the back of the chair. And he takes off his kaftan and balances it on top. And then carefully, so carefully, he takes the plate of roast lamb and other dainties, and begins feeding them to his robes.

'What are you doing?!' everyone asks.

'Isn't it obvious?' replies Hoja 'Clearly my robes are the ones who were invited to the feast. When I was without them, the steward only gave me a little bowl of lentils and bade me sit in the corner...'

....In our gospel today, Jesus is dining with a leader of the Pharisees for the sabbath meal. It's an invitation of honour and respect: A faithful Jewish leader inviting a poor, itinerant storyteller, healer and rabbi to share the sabbath. The Pharisees were Jews who believed in the bodily resurrection, and who were shaping a Jewish theology less dependent on the Temple and Jerusalem, more focused on individual piety and faithful family life. Some Pharisees would, like Paul, become important leaders in early Christianity. Others would become the theologians who shaped modern rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70AD.

We don't know much from Luke's Gospel today about this particular Pharisee. What we do know is that in inviting Jesus, the Pharisee got a guest even more difficult than old Hoja. I wonder if he regretted his invitation? I wonder if he looked at his poorer neighbours in a new way after this uncomfortable dinner?

Luke goes out of his way to underscore how shockingly direct Jesus was with his host:

"He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends..."

Did you catch that repetition? Jesus talks about invitations to the one who had invited him. Luke makes it clear that Jesus didn't mind making his host feel uncomfortable. Inviting Jesus to the table didn't mean much, unless his host was willing to change his whole way of thinking:

In the cultures of Jesus' time, and of Luke's time — cultures of Jewish and Roman communities in Late Antiquity — everyone was very aware of matters of honour and shame. About who sits next to who – sorry, who sits next to *whom*.

These days we're a bit more muddled about such matters. Thank you notes are quickly a thing of the past. Gift giving and invitations are all a bit haphazard. At the most, we might know which friend never remembers that it's their turn to get the next round at the pub.

Yet the anxieties about prestige and privilege in our Gospel are still very present. We still live in a world obsessed with power and privilege. We measure followers and likes. And we know how judgemental people still can be when it comes to accent, class, race and nationality. Too often in communities around the UK, there are some who are welcome to eat at the table and others who are told that — because of their immigration status, their sexuality, the colour of their skin — they should take what's given them, no matter how scant, and sit quietly in the corner and be silently grateful.

Now we might just stop at Jesus' commandment to invite the poor and the outcast to our table. But Jesus has of course gone further, challenging not only our generosity but putting our own pride under the spotlight: "When you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place."

Our Christian calling is not to act out the part of Lady Bountiful, handing out food to the hungry but never examining our *own* privilege, no matter how slight. Jesus makes clear that calling is to humble ourselves. And not just about wealth — but to humble ourselves in contrast to all the powers and principalities of this world. To stand with and as the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, the excluded. And to find our faith *precisely* in the places at the margins of our society.

If we come to Christ trusting in our strength, our privilege, our self-righteousness — if we come to Christ because we believe that somehow our culture or race or nationality are what makes us Christian — then will Christ laugh and like Hoja feed our glamorous robes instead of us? But, in the words of the Prayer Book's 'Prayer of Humble Access': "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness but in thy manifold and great mercies"

There is no earthly privilege or cultural identity that gives us admission to that Heavenly Banquet. Rather, we come to the great Wedding Feast because the Bridegroom himself, Jesus Christ, was born among us in humility, and humbled himself even to the cross. It is by his humility that we, in fear and trembling, are lifted up. And it in imitating that humility, trusting not in our own righteousness, but in Christ's mercy, that we are told: "Friend, move up higher."

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how the Pharisee felt when Jesus said he shouldn't invite his friends but the poor?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder why Jesus said not to sit in the place of honour?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

These prayers are adapted from 'Prayers of the People, Form IV' in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (The Episcopal Church, USA):

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honour one another and serve the common good. We pray especially for the peoples of Palestine and Israel, Ukraine, Sudan, and all places suffering under war, violence, and famine.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honour and glory.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, for those in our community and for the strangers we meet this week. We pray especially for the homeless and the outcast, for refugees and those far from home, and all those in need this day. Grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation. We remember especially _____ and all those whom we name in our hearts at this time.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom. We bring before God those who have died and the anniversary of their death falls this week [including _____] and also all those whom we name in our hearts at this time.

Silence

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

○ Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, ○ lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Suggested hymns/songs

○ thou who camest from above
Before thy throne, ○ God, we kneel
Help us to help each other, Lord
Praise, my soul, the King of heaven
Christ is the King, ○ friends, rejoice!
○ for a closer walk with God
Tell out, my soul

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/> (weekly@lectionary resource)