

OT: Ecclesiasticus 10.12-18

NT: Hebrews 13.1-8, 15-16

Gp: Luke 14.1, 7-14

I was at St George's Everton on Thursday morning for a wedding rehearsal. The church was buzzing with activity. There was an English class going on for people who have moved here and for whom English is not their first language. And members of the church community were busy stocking up the food pantry which is open to all in need. There that morning the gospel was being lived out and all without the aid of a priest!

On the drive there through Everton and then afterwards through Walton, two of the poorest areas of our city and part of our Deanery, I saw evidence of this new trend, of hanging the flags of St George or Union Jacks from lampposts. Whatever the intention of those who are doing this, it's hard not to assume that there is a racial connotation, that somehow anyone who isn't white and British is not welcome. It was heartening to see recently that members of a mosque in Birkenhead were not daunted by a hooded figure flying a Union Jack outside their building. Instead the Imam took in the flag and displayed it in the mosque window to show that they too embrace being British.

There seems to be two issues at work here. The first is that some politicians like to focus on an enemy, whether it's Europe or wokeism or now immigrants. It deflects from their own shortcomings and helps to stir up a population who might otherwise feel ignored. And that is the second point, so many people do feel ignored. Life is a daily struggle, money is tight, work is precarious, others seem to be getting more of their share of the cake.

The essence of today's readings is that we can get caught up in our own pride, in our rush to the best seat at the table, in wanting to associate only with our own kind. And all this at the price of being open to other people, judging by appearances, believing stereotypes, leaving many behind.

In his book, *The Bone Clocks*, David Mitchell has a character who says: *People are icebergs, with just a bit you can see and loads you can't.* In Harper Lee's book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch memorably says: *You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.* And the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

All this is a prod to us, not to be complacent, not to be comfortably content but always to strive for the good of others. To put ourselves at the bottom of the table and invite others to take the better seats.

To remember too that whatever blessings we enjoy in this world come not really from our own efforts but through the grace of God. We may have worked but he has brought the success.

I'm sure that not many of us here have had to flee from our homes to escape persecution and death, that we have not had to risk our children's lives in order to try and bring them to a place of safety, that people do not regularly stand outside our homes shouting insults and threatening violence. Equally there may not be many of us here who have to rely on Foodbanks or who worry how to pay the rent or the utility bills.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus says: *The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord,*

May we never take for granted all the safety and the comforts that we enjoy. May we never lose sight of knowing that we are but dust without the grace of God. That we owe a debt we can never repay. That all people are equal in God's eyes and all deserve the opportunity to enjoy peaceful, fulfilled lives.

So while we cannot pay back the debt, it has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we can and must work for the good of all, just as the people of St George's are trying in the place where they find themselves.

If we remain open to the Holy Spirit, we may find ourselves in places and with people we may not have imagined. We may even encounter angels. But I'm certain that we will find God there too, leading us on to do his work until his kingdom is fulfilled and all people are gathered into his love.

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