

SERMON — ST.ANDREW'S, KITCHENER — AUGUST 31, 2025

Jer 2:4-13; Heb 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:7-14

I'll keep things relatively short, as we all have a banquet — or barbecue — to get to. After hearing the Gospel, we'll all be particularly attentive to where everyone sits...

One couldn't ask for a better set of Sunday lectionary readings to come up for a priest's final day in a parish that has meant so much to them. The first reading is a bit condemnatory, true. But it's the prophet's passionate urging for the community to do honest self-examination, and to remain true to their calling. It's a call that applies to all of us; to all who call St. Andrew's home, and to myself, as a priest in this diocese. It's a warning against idols; like I described a week or two ago: idols are comfortable, but ultimately false. The imagery here this week is of water: look for the living water (from God); not stagnant water, from cracked cisterns. In the ordination service, priests are exhorted: *"In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come."* It's been both an incredible learning experience and incredible honour to be in this position of pointing to and sharing that living water of Divine Grace, through teaching and preaching and administering the sacraments. So often, in this part of the world at this particular time, it feels like we're wandering through the wilderness, like the ancient Hebrews did. But if we know the story, we know that they were led by a pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night, and they were given miraculous water from the rock, and daily bread to sustain them through each day. And the same is true for us. Note that the rector is *NOT* the living water him or herself. (That would be to make the rector into an idol.) Remember that even Moses didn't make it into the Promised Land... but the community did, led by a new leader. I'm reminded of a

quote attributed to Pablo Picasso: something like *"tradition is not wearing your grand[parent]'s hat; tradition is having a baby."* It's a living tradition, an openness to new things, to surprise. It involves vulnerability and yes, openness to precariousness and risk. It's living water (itself sometimes risky), not tepid water in cracked cisterns.

The Gospel story gives us another view into who and what we're called to be, as the community of Jesus. We're a community formed by a meal. We are called to be people of hospitality, making room for others; not jockeying for position. As I've reassured some in recent months, St. Andrew's is an exciting place to be. Sometimes we've used the image of the 'little church that could' to describe this congregation. A church that never endeavoured to take the higher seat, but in recent years has found itself with renewed vision and in an exciting, growing part of town. Ten, twenty years ago very few would have predicted this neighbourhood to be surrounded by so many large housing projects, and serviced by the light rail line, just down the street. This brings both promise, and challenge. As Church, our ministry of hospitality calls us out of our comfort zones; we are not, ultimately, the hosts, but *Jesus is*. Yes, it is good that we can have and make friends at church. But the gospel reminds us: *"Do not invite your friends.... invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."* Jesus calls us out of our comfort zones, and challenges us to live differently; to operate from a different ethic. To go toward the maybe untamed living water, rather than reach for the tepid water.

And the Letter to the Hebrews gives a list of what this kind of life looks like. In times of change — of losing a leader — it's normal to sometimes feel disoriented, as if lost at sea, in that crashing, overflowing living water. But our task (your task) is not hidden. We're given a few examples in this letter, and in it we will recognize that which we are already doing, and the ways in which we're called to grow: *Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to*

strangers.... Remember those who are in prison.... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.... ...[S]ay with confidence 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"

That I have been a part of this ministry, I am thankful. That I have been part of strengthening this ministry in this place, with you, has been an honour. That you bore with me as I learned and grew, as we experienced graces and successes, risked failure, rubbed up against one another, and even some times when I may have challenged you or taken you out of your comfort zone: may you be sustained in similar times to come, remembering the words we heard: *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."*