

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Phil & I have been privileged to be in community with the former Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Andrew Hutcheson, when we were in Cobble Hill and attending St. John the Baptist. Andrew quickly became one of my favourite people and mentors. I have many wonderful memories of him, but this is one my favourites. St. John's loves their potluck community meals. They have them a number of times throughout the year. The hall was always crammed full, to the very limit dictated by the Fire Marshall. The tables would be set up in 4 long rows with one head table. Much like a wedding banquet. Soon after Andrew retired and joined our parish, we had one of these potlucks. My husband Phil is an extreme introvert, so always chose a place at the far end of the table on one side of the hall so he wasn't surrounded by people. We had just gotten ourselves seated when Andrew and his wife Lois sat down across from us. There were plenty of seats available close to the head table, so I was a little confused why they chose the end of the table. This confusion must have shown on my face because Andrew quoted from our Gospel reading this morning, "But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place." He didn't continue the quote which goes on to say, "so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." For Andrew wasn't in the least interested in being exalted! His was not a strategy, but a natural state of humility.

In our world today, the pursuit of recognition and status is everywhere. Social media has become a stage for it—Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and I'm sure others I'm too old to know about—places where people curate their lives for display. The posts are almost always positive, showing off the best vacations, the new job promotion, the perfect family moment, even the clever pet trick. They are carefully chosen glimpses designed to signal success and worthiness to the online community. And the unspoken expectation is that others will respond, will “like” or comment, will affirm that this life is admirable and enviable. For many, this becomes a constant striving—to be noticed, to be celebrated, to be seen as important. Thomas Merton warns us that “People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.” His words could have been written for our age of social media and self-promotion. The danger is not simply that we strive—it's that we may be striving for the wrong things altogether.

How very different was Andrew's choice at that potluck. He did not need the best seat or the spotlight. He did not measure his worth by recognition, but instead quietly chose the lowly place, the far end of the table. His humility was not a tactic, not a performance, but a way of being.

This morning's readings from Hebrews and Luke belong together. They both invite us to see hospitality and humility not as strategies to gain recognition, but as a way of life that mirrors the very character of God.

The Letter to the Hebrews begins with this command: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers” (13:2). The Greek verb here implies mindfulness. In other words, hospitality is not something we stumble into, it requires intention. The

word for hospitality is even more striking: φιλοξενίας (*philoxenías*), literally “love of strangers.” The opposite, of course, is *xenophobia*, fear of strangers. Hospitality in the Christian sense is not merely entertaining friends or hosting people who are already like us. It is the deliberate act of extending love to those who are different, unknown, perhaps even unsettling to us. The writer adds: “for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Abraham and Sarah, when they welcomed three strangers in Genesis 18, found themselves in the presence of God’s messengers. Lot, when he welcomed travelers in Genesis 19, discovered he was sheltering angels. The point is clear: when we welcome the stranger, we may be brushing up against the divine in ways we cannot see.

Later in Hebrews 13 we hear: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (v. 16). Again, the command to intentionally act. The Greek word for “do good” is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. It means **more** than moral correctness; it means concrete, practical acts of kindness. The word translated as “share” is one you may be familiar with, κοινωνίας (*koinōnías*). We often translate it as “fellowship,” but it is deeper than coffee hour chit-chat. It means a genuine participation, a mutual sharing of resources and lives. The writer calls these acts “sacrifices.” In the Hebrew scriptures, sacrifices were animals offered in the temple. But here the priestly language is reimagined: the sacrifices that please God are not burnt offerings, but lives poured out in generosity, kindness, and shared community.

Our Gospel lesson from Luke today teaches us about humility at the table. Jesus had been invited to a Pharisee’s house, and as he watched the guests jostling for the best seats, he told this parable: do not seek the places of honour, but rather

sit low, content to be unnoticed. In God's kingdom, the way up is down, and the way to honour is humility. He tells the guests at the Pharisee's house: "When you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place" (v. 10). In the ancient world, where you sat at a meal was a public signal of your status. Seating was like currency. If you wanted to honour someone, you placed them close to the host. If you wanted to shame someone, you pushed them to the end of the table. These arrangements communicated power and prestige as clearly as who gets the corner office today, or who drives the newest car, or whose child's birthday party gets the most likes on social media. Our world is full of the same subtle signals—our clothes, our neighbourhoods, the way we present ourselves online—all tools we use to climb ladders and show where we stand. But here's the truth: the endless competition, the jockeying for attention, the craving for recognition—it's exhausting. We can accumulate titles, possessions, likes, and followers, but if our worth depends on outshining others, our hearts end up cold and empty.

That's why Jesus' teaching is so radical. He doesn't say, "abolish the table." He knows the system of honour and shame will always be with us. But he tells us to choose differently: "Take the lowest place." In Greek, it is τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον (*ton eschaton topon*), literally "the last place." Ἐσχατος is the word from which we get *eschatology*—the "last things." Jesus is hinting that the kingdom of God is already present in the way we seat ourselves at the table. The great reversal of the end times is foreshadowed in the seating chart at dinner.

Jesus drives the point home with a play on words: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The Greek words mean "lift high" and "make low." The reversal is absolute: lift yourself up,

and you will be brought down; make yourself low, and God will lift you high. And then Jesus stretches the teaching even further: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” (vv. 13–14). We have been hearing about this all summer, haven’t we? To seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. To care for the poor, the widow and the orphan. Why invite these ones? Because, Jesus says, “they can’t repay you.” In other words, this isn’t a quid pro quo situation. True hospitality is not about trading favours. It is about loving without expectation of return. This is the difference between transactional and transformational relationships. Transactional relationships keep the books balanced, you do for me; I do for you, but nothing really changes. Transformational relationships go deeper: they give freely, without repayment, and in doing so, they change us. A transformational giver often remains anonymous, not wanting to receive credit or be repaid. But Jesus says: “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Repayment comes not from our guests, but from God. Only God rewards true hospitality, and the reward comes not in this age, but in the age to come. But I would say that it also comes in the ways that our lives are transformed, our hearts softened and opened, with new relationships and friendships.

But have you ever thought that we might be the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind? Still, Jesus freely extends his invitation and welcomes us to his table. We are sinners, and yet by God’s grace, we are given seats of honour at God’s banquet. It is a wonder that we are welcomed at all, for we can’t repay or reciprocate God’s hospitality. So how are we to respond to such gracious generosity? We respond by extending the same grace: opening our lives to those who are different from us to those with whom we would not normally associate. In

this way, our lives become an echo of God's hospitality. We do not "pay God back"—for that is impossible—but we reflect God's love by sharing it.

When Andrew and Lois chose to sit at the end of the table, they were not following a strategy to be moved up. They were simply living the humility of Christ. And in doing so, they showed us the shape of true discipleship.

The call of Hebrews and Luke is the same for us today. To show love of strangers, not forgetting, but deliberately choosing hospitality. To offer practical kindness and genuine sharing, as our sacrifices to God. To choose the lowest place, trusting that God's kingdom exalts the humble. To welcome those who cannot pay us back, confident that the only repayment that matters comes from God.

This isn't easy. It runs against the grain of a culture that rewards self-promotion and values networking for advantage and the art of the deal. But in Christ we are called to a different kind of banquet—the banquet of grace—where honour belongs to the lowly and the table is set for the outsider. So, let us not seek recognition, nor serve with hidden agendas, nor practice hospitality only when it is convenient. Let us choose humility and service for their own sake, because this is the way of Jesus. "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." May our lives, our tables, and our hearts reflect this great reversal of God's kingdom — the kingdom where the far end of the table is often the closest seat to Christ

Amen.