**The Rt Revd Dr Flora Winfield, Bishop of Selby, reflects on Luke 14.1, 7-14 for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. This week's reading finds Jesus in the midst of a series of teachings which are all about kindness, generosity, and the breadth of God's mercy. In the preceding chapter, we hear that Jesus was going from one town and village to another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. That’s the context for this incident, when we find Jesus going into the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath. In this series of teachings, we find many occasions when Jesus is healing, responding to need, encouraging people to think about humility and hospitality. It includes, in the next chapter, the parable of the lost sheep, and the lost coin, and the Prodigal Son.

So, we're in the midst of a very familiar series of teaching when we come to this bit in Luke chapter 14. Here is Jesus looking at the guests of honour at the banquet, so he tells a parable. There he is, seated in this Pharisee's house, surrounded by people who have pushed themselves into the best places at the table. But he is showing them the true nature of gospel humility, to which his disciples are called.

I invite you to think about the most wonderful event you've ever gone to. Perhaps it was a lovely family dinner, maybe at Christmas, or at Easter, perhaps a wedding, or something at work. A really special event where the table has been set, all are welcome, the food is lovely, the waiters and waitresses are attentive, everything is good, and you find yourself there at a table, taking your place. It's a lovely feeling to be included.

Here, Jesus is pointing out there is not just room at the table for everyone, but actually a place. He says when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Invite everyone. Make sure that there's room for everybody at the table of God's generosity. He is showing us here something very profound about the nature of the Eucharist.

Here the table is set for all of us. The table is set for the banquet of God's generosity, where we are all called to come to the table and find the place which is laid for us, and sit in it, and find there nourishment for our souls as bread and God's Word are broken. Find there a sense of devotion and inclusion which is at the heart of our calling to be part of Christ's Church.

Here, none of us is worthy, but all of us are welcome. All of us have a place at the table. Here, too, we are fed and encouraged for the task to which Christ calls us, which is the task of building his kingdom, which is a place of welcome, a place of kindness and inclusion, a place where there is truly room for everyone.

So, as we take our places at Christ's table, we're also called to see all the tables of our lives as places where Christ sets a place for us; the table where we eat our supper on our own, maybe, or where we have family meals, argumentative or joyful. The table where we endure long meetings, perhaps at work, or where we share together in the councils and the governance of the Church. All those tables, every table, is a place where Christ is present with us, where Christ calls us to take our place and to live as his children, his disciples, to recognise in every meal we share the potential for his presidency and presence, and to know that he calls us always to be present as his faithful disciples, full of welcome, sharing the sense of God's generous welcome to us.

So here is George Herbert's wonderful poem, ‘Love’, which puts this so much better than any of the rest of us could:

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 lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, 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 I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame

                             Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?

                             My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:

                             So I did sit and eat.

Amen.