

Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Hands up if you have ever entertained angels! Hands up if you have ever opened up your house and invited the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to dinner.

It's sometimes not at all easy to follow Jesus's words – are we to interpret them literally, and never invite friends or relatives or rich neighbours to dinner (poor neighbours would be OK, of course)? But before we can try to answer that question, I think there are some broader principles in our readings this morning.

Our psalm says that, "it goes well with those who are generous in lending and order their affairs with justice", and that such people "have given freely to the poor". So, here are immediately principles of generosity and justice.

The writer of Hebrews requires us not to neglect to show hospitality to strangers, so here are principles of hospitality and looking out for those who are strangers in our midst.

In our gospel reading, Jesus first stresses the importance of humility, not thinking of ourselves as more important or better than others, not being, we might say, snobs, and so doing away with hierarchy. And then He reinforces the principle of generosity that we've already seen from the psalm, and particularly to those who are in need of sympathy and support – the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and so on.

And I think these broader principles of generosity, justice, humility and hospitality have broader application than just who to entertain, who to invite to dinner.

Let me take you back, perhaps rather poignantly, to the book of Leviticus in the OT and God's words to the people of Israel, amongst which we find these: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself. For you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (19:33-34).

So, here is generosity to strangers which first requires not oppressing them, then treating them as though they were citizens, and then goes beyond that and requires loving them: you shall *love* the alien as yourself. And this is, of course, familiar to us from the NT in Jesus's own words: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:39).

Then let me take you to some words of St Paul in the NT: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Here is the radical working out of Jesus's words about humility – not thinking of yourself as better than others, not being snobbish. It is no longer "or" (Jew *or* Greek, slave *or* free, male *or* female) but always 'and': Jew *and* Greek, slave *and* free, male *and* female. There is no hierarchy in the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated, for all are equally children of God in the kingdom of God.

Applying that to our world today, we need to be among those who maintain that there are Palestinians *and* Israelis, equally children of God. Ukrainians *and* Russians, equally children of

God. That there are citizens *and* refugees *and* asylum seekers, all equally children of God in the kingdom of God.

Taking the issue of asylum seekers and hotels, the alien among us, which is very much at the forefront for us, what might that mean in practical terms? Alison and I were in London last weekend and took the opportunity of going to St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square on Sunday morning. They are very much tuned into this issue, not least because some members of their congregation are asylum seekers living in hotels in their parish. And their response was not just to pray, not just to provide personal support, but also to encourage the members of their congregation to join with the anti-racism protestors against the protests taking place outside the hotels. Political action, in other words.

And, even if we don't want to use overtly Christian language to get our point across, we can, as Rowan Williams said in yesterday's Guardian,¹ simply recognise that migrants are ordinary people too, with ordinary desires for safety for themselves and their children, ordinary aspirations for education and livelihoods, many of whom happen to have been subject to extreme conditions from which they have had to escape.

Now this is not to say that the protests about asylum seekers and hotels is straightforward xenophobia. There are genuine concerns about the appropriateness of hotels as accommodation for asylum seekers, not least amongst asylum seekers themselves. But these are, nonetheless, ordinary people who are also strangers in our midst, and we are required by our faith to ensure they are not oppressed, to treat them as though they were citizens, and beyond that required to love them as ourselves. St Martin-in-the-Fields is at the sharp end of that and, from what we could see, is taking its Christian responsibilities in that regard very seriously.

Closer to home, we have seen Union Jacks and St George's flags in several of our villages. And while the claim may be that this is simply patriotism, it seems more likely that it is an unwarranted nationalism and, quite probably, xenophobia, where the Union Jack has been hijacked by one group and given a meaning that doesn't represent everyone's views.

I heard the story of a local Councillor in Darlington confronting some roofers with long ladders attaching flags to lamp posts. The men were abusive and aggressive, threatened to throw a bucket of urine over her, and filmed her intrusively then posted this, edited of course, online, since when people, knowing who she is as the local councillor and where she lives, have hurled abuse at her at or near her home. As Rowan Williams also said, collective blame and indiscriminate violence are always the beginning of real moral corruption.

It is, of course, not easy to know how to respond to this kind of aggressive, anti-social and, quite possibly, racist behaviour. Durham County Council has put up a very considered response on its website.² But for us as Christians, we are called not only to love our neighbour, but Jesus also tells us: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Non-

¹ Rowan Williams, 'Terror in hotels, rage outside – but they're all ordinary people', Guardian 30 August 2025.

² [News-Statement on flags and other displays - Durham County Council](#)

racists *and* racists, equally children of God, even if we believe racists are seriously mistaken in their views and actions. But beyond prayer and offering personal support to those affected if we know anyone in that position, perhaps we personally can and should do something more to confront such racism, to enact the principles of generosity, hospitality, and justice to which we are called. To take political action, in other words.

And as church here, we have a commitment to generosity, and to being “a welcoming and inclusive community where people who are marginalised or excluded in wider society, including ... immigrants, can know that they fully belong” (from our Parish Profile), so that we are publicly committed to offering a safe space for all. And that might, in today’s circumstances, not just be nice words, but might make some very practical demands of us.

So, I think today’s readings go a lot further than just who to invite to dinner. And it is, of course, always possible that, individually or collectively, in offering sanctuary, support and hospitality to strangers, we find that we have entertained angels without knowing it.

Amen