
The sermon text for today is based on the Gospel, Luke Chapter 14, verses 1 and 12 to 14.

Provided by The Lutheran Church of Australia

Blessed are the Hospitable

Lillie loves to open her home to others. Often church folk have gathered around the organ in her home and sang together in praise of our Lord. The highlight of this time of fellowship is the supper which Lillie has delighted to prepare. Were you to ask her, she'd say with other Christians who love to practice hospitality that she has always received far more from her practice of hospitality than she's ever given to others. In inviting folk into her home, she has no doubt "entertained angels unawares." In stories of Christian hospitality, it's a case of **"for it is in giving that we receive."** In fact, it's hard to tell where giving and receiving begin or end.

Many Christians will tell you that some of the happiest moments of their lives have been when they've invited newcomers or visitors into their homes and discovered with great joy how much they have in common with them. From New Testament times until recently, hospitality has been one of the chief ways Christians have expressed their love for strangers. The Greek word used in the New Testament for hospitality means **"love of strangers"**. The New Testament uses the same word for "guest" as for "stranger". The early Christians were treated as strangers in the Roman Empire because of their strange new Faith. It was the warm welcome strangers received into Christian homes that assisted the rapid growth of the Christian Church.

A powerful opponent of Christianity, the Emperor Julian, wrote: **"It is the Christians' benevolence to strangers ... that has done the most to increase [it]"**. In our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan, a foreigner, treats a Jewish stranger as his neighbour. Jesus acted as Host to 5,000 hungry listeners when He fed them all from the five loaves and two fishes a boy gave to Him. What a motley lot of people there would have been in that crowd. We need to see newcomers, guests and visitors as our Lord does. **"I was a stranger and you welcomed Me"**, Jesus says in Matthew 25:35.

On the way to Damascus, two disciples of Jesus welcomed what they thought was a stranger into their home. What a blessing that turned out to be as they discovered the stranger was Jesus! Our potential guests may not look like the Jesus we expect. But then, how often do we expect our Lord to come in the guise of a newcomer or visitor? The New Testament links hospitality to folk we've never had in our homes previously, to love for Jesus. It's a practice that enriches all involved. The quality of hospitality doesn't depend on the cost of food, but on the warm, enthusiastic welcome given and received.

In encouraging you to show hospitality, I'm not wanting in any way to place an added burden on you, but inviting you to be blessed, really blessed, beyond all expectation, through your practice of hospitality. This is something too good to just leave to others. Jesus invites you to look on others as either your neighbour or a potential new friend. Many Christians have found that in their practice

of hospitality, the distinction between host and guest evaporates in recognition of a new-found unity between those involved. Angels are messengers from God. Your guest may be a messenger from God as you discover how much they can bring God's presence into your life.

Meals in the Bible were never secular occasions. They frequently turned out to be events of great religious significance. Simon the Pharisee's guest in the Book of Luke is, through the stranger - the woman who weeps on Jesus' feet - revealed to be the ultimate Guest. As the meal proceeds, the role of known and stranger, guest and host, is reversed. Jesus becomes a Host with the best news ever, that is, forgiveness for even public sinners, and the welcome announcement that the woman's faith in Jesus has saved her.

After Easter, Christ's followers discern His identity when He assumes the role of Host in the **"Breaking and Blessing of Bread"**. This "breaking and blessing of bread" illustrates Holy Communion where Christ Himself shares His richest treasures with us, so that we can pass onto others the blessings we've received from Him. Of all the means by which Jesus could have chosen to be remembered, He chose to be remembered by a meal, by His Holy Supper. What our Lord considered memorable and characteristic of His ministry was His table fellowship. Jesus transformed one of our most common daily events into an occasion of profound spiritual import. The early Christian Church continued His approach.

An outstanding feature of the Church in the New Testament is its enthusiastic practice of hospitality. The Book of the Acts ends by telling us that St. Paul practised what he taught: **"Get into the habit of inviting strangers home for dinner (Romans 12:13)"**, Paul encourages us. While in Rome he welcomed all who came to him for a bite to eat (Acts 28:30). In St. Peter's first letter, Peter implores us to **"Be hospitable to one another without complaining (1 Peter 4:9)."** In his third letter, St. John commends Gaius for his exemplary hospitality: **"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the Church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore, we ought to support such people (3 John 1:5-8)."**

Worship flourishes in a climate of hospitality. Research has found that the most important factor in whether visitors return to Church again was the presence of welcoming hospitality. Hospitality brings the Church into our homes and links Church and home inseparably together. We need to see our church as a "House of Hospitality", and perhaps set aside the fifth Sunday of the month as "Hospitality Day".

As we receive Jesus into our homes and meet His hunger, He reminds us that He is preparing, as our Host in heaven, a place where we will be His guests forever. Jesus moves among us now in ways we often only discover in hindsight. We can do more for one another than we're aware of, as we act as co-hosts with Jesus.

Young people can make us feel younger as we listen to their fresh ideas and life plans. We can travel to others places in our imagination as they tell us about their home-places. A listening ear is the best cure for loneliness. I know of people who felt unneeded and undervalued until someone

invited them into their home. It's easy to be hospitable to relatives and close friends. In today's Gospel reading, our Lord presents us with something more challenging and open to unexpected blessings. We offer hospitality in the context of Christ's kindness to us, with our Lord as both our gracious Host and our blessed Guest. You don't need surplus resources to do this. We aren't out to impress anyone. Our Lord promises to bless whatever we share with others. It has been remarked on again and again that Christians of modest means make the best hosts. Hospitality can include a host of activities like afternoon tea, a card games afternoon, a chat over coffee, a video evening, a walk along the rail-line walking track, or an invitation to drop in for half an hour when the other person is nearby.

Visitors are to be received into our homes without apology, even when preparations haven't been completed or when a house is untidy. The hosts needn't do everything by themselves. Let your guests assist if they ask to. Resources can be pooled, like "Let's have a leftovers party together." Hospitality which is done for Christ doesn't suffer the mistakes Martha made in Luke 10:40. **"Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to Him and asked, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.'"**

No, hospitality comes before pride. It's carried out in a spirit of humble service for the glory of God rather than as an end in itself. **"Given and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap (Luke 6:38)."** You will receive a far greater blessing than you give.

The Christian practice of hospitality is too weighted with blessing to be postponed. God's Word urges you, **"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Romans 15:7)."** Above all, respond eagerly to your Lord's call to you – that He may remain a permanent Guest in your home. He says, **"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with Me (Revelation 3:20)."**

**"Lord Jesus, we are Your guests;
Through Your gifts to us, may others be blessed." Amen.**