

WEEKLY SERMON

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Make yourself at home

John 14 1, 7-14

When inviting a guest into my home I will often show them into the living room and say 'please, have a seat'.

It's quite usual for them then to ask me which is my seat in response, but it has always struck me I wouldn't really say I had one. In truth I often do sit in the same place - we are creatures of habit after all - but I certainly wouldn't be bothered if somebody took it.

In churches it is astonishing how many people week after week choose to sit in the same place. I'm sure they don't think it belongs to them, but we like to do what we usually do.

(In the old days some wealthy families even had their own 'box' or reserved seating in church to guarantee they got their seat every week.)

Some of this desire to seek out our own place lies behind this reading; though it is more about entitlement; people feeling they have a right to a certain seat, a place of honour in proceedings.

I remember serving as a Mayor's Chaplain some years ago. The duties included attending at least the start of council meetings and leading prayers.

At one time I remember that the order of processions at civic events was on the agenda. I won't bore you with the details, but it is fair to say that it took councillors several meetings and much consultation and discussion before eventually voting on the matter.

When they did so, there was a split vote and the status quo remained.

All that energy that could have been used on other matters had been given over to something that, by any stretch of the imagination, wasn't all that important.

Today, Jesus is addressing those of us who might feel sometimes that we have a right to a certain place. This is not Kingdom-thinking he says. It is more important to realise who isn't with you at the banquet, so to speak.

Who is it that we are excluding by our assumptions, our behaviours and our entitlement?

Even if we don't mean to do it, are we excluding certain people by assumptions that we make?

It is always a good thing for a parish to stop and think about that from time to time; to notice who ISN'T there.

When we've done that, we might then reasonably go out and look to invite the people who aren't there. To consider what is it about our assumptions, behaviours and entitlement that needs to change in order that those people might come and join us.

If we know anything else about the Good News of Jesus, it is that it is for all. Perhaps you can find some time in the next few days to stop and think about your own church and your own assumptions?

And together, as we think about them, we might wonder who is missing from our church, from our lives and who might it be that we should be inviting to join the greatest party of all: the Eucharistic feast which is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all people.

The Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES