

## **Sermon for 31st August – Proper 17 (Year C)**

**Texts: Luke 14:1, 7–14; Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16**

**Theme: *Pride, Hospitality, and Life at the Margins***

### Introduction

Jesus had a gift for turning ordinary moments into extraordinary lessons. In Luke 14, He uses a simple meal to reveal deep truths about God's kingdom—addressing pride, humility, and the radical call to include those society overlooks. In Hebrews, we hear a similar echo: *“Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters... show hospitality to strangers... do good and share with others.”*

Let me start with a modern story:

An elderly man went to the doctor for a hearing test. The doctor fitted him with a tiny hearing aid and asked him to try it for six months. When the man returned, the doctor asked, “How's it going?” The man replied, “Perfectly! I've changed my will six times—I can finally hear what my family says when they think I can't!”

Even in families, people can feel ignored—especially the elderly, those living with disabilities, or those who don't fit the “normal” mold. But Christian faith calls us to something different: *Generous inclusion of all ages, of people from different contexts and people with difficulties*. This is why Christian communities across the world have started schools for children with autism, homes for the elderly, and ministries for the differently-abled—because their lives matter to God. Today readings help us in three steps how to Recognise our greatness, assert ourselves and have self-confidence, yet be humble! Name the boundaries and reach out to people at the margins and regardless of our comfort Zones, show radical Christian hospitality to strangers. Pride can come out of human autonomy without humility and boundaries are human made

and serving Christ at the margins beyond boundaries and welcoming strangers are part of Growing diversity mission of the church.

### 1. Human Autonomy – Humility and Pride

At the Pharisee's table, Jesus notices guests scrambling for the best seats. He warns:

*"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* Pride is sneaky. It's not just about looking down on others—it's about overestimating ourselves. Here's a story: A well-known preacher once stopped a young boy to ask for directions to the post office. After the boy explained, the preacher said, "Come to church tonight—I'll tell you the way to heaven." The boy smiled and said, "Sir, if you don't know how to get to the post office, how will you know the way to heaven?" Ouch! God has a way of humbling us when we think too highly of ourselves. This isn't new. Pride goes all the way back to Genesis:

- Adam and Eve chose autonomy over obedience, wanting to "be like God."
- At Babel, people said, "Let's make a name for ourselves," and built a tower instead of trusting God.
- Israel demanded a king so they could "be like the nations."

In all these stories, pride dethrones God and enthrones self. It says, *"I know better."* And the result? Brokenness. True greatness, Jesus says, comes from humble dependence on God—not self-promotion.

### 2. Boundaries and Margins

Jesus then says something shocking: *"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."* In other words, *widen your circle.*

We love our boundaries—they make us feel safe. But God's kingdom doesn't play by those rules. Think of a child at an airport who runs past security, not

understanding boundaries. Children invite friends without caring about status or power. But as adults, we often shrink our world to those “like us.”

Sometimes, we’re like the frog in the well who can’t imagine an ocean. We see only our small circle. But God’s dream is bigger: a community where everyone belongs.

Look at Peter in Acts—his vision broke the barrier between Jew and Gentile. The early church had to wrestle with this at the Jerusalem Council. God’s mission is always about crossing lines and breaking walls. The Old Testament makes this clear:

- *“God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner”* (Deut 10:18-19).
- Gleaning laws (Lev 19:9-10) and Jubilee laws ensured care for the vulnerable. Why? Because God’s love doesn’t stop at human borders. When we take sides with the marginalized—the orphan, widow, refugee, differently-abled—we take sides with God. That’s how heaven touches earth.

### 3. Welcoming Strangers

Hebrews urges us:

*“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.”* Remember Abraham welcoming three strangers—and discovering they were messengers of God. Jesus takes it even further: *“When you welcome a stranger, you welcome me.”*

Hospitality in the Bible isn’t about impressing guests—it’s about making room for the other. It’s listening, including, and valuing every life. Today, the debate around migrants and asylum seekers is filled with fear. But Scripture calls us to something different: love. Leviticus says,

*“Love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.”*

Jesus sharpens this in Matthew 25:

*"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."* To welcome the stranger is to welcome Christ Himself. To exclude is to reject Him. Hospitality is not a social nicety—it's a spiritual act. It's kingdom work.

St Mary's already lives out Christ's hospitality through its worship, pastoral care, and charitable work—this reflects the heart of the kingdom. Yet Jesus in Luke 14 and Hebrews 13 calls us to go further, practicing radical inclusion by welcoming those on the margins and strangers in our midst. This means asking who is missing from our Eucharistic table and seeking out refugees, people of other cultures and faiths, the lonely, and the young who feel disconnected. The Gospel invites us to make God's table as wide as heaven's, not as an act of charity but as the core of our mission. In a world shaped by fear, nationalism, and debates about migration, we must respond with faith and love—our security is in Christ, not in walls or borders. Hospitality becomes an act of peace-making, pushing back against division and hostility and creating space for God's kingdom to break into a fractured world. When we move beyond comfort zones to welcome the stranger, we not only bless others—we welcome Christ Himself and reflect His inclusive love to the world.

Pride isolates; humility invites. Boundaries divide; grace includes. Fear excludes; love welcomes. Hebrews reminds us: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* The Jesus who welcomed sinners and strangers calls us to do the same—at our tables, in our churches, in our lives. So let's open our hearts and homes. Let's live generously—not for recognition, but because Christ is present in "the least of these." And let's offer not just words of praise, but lives of love—because *"with such sacrifices, God is pleased."*

Amen.