**No 4 Top Table Luke 14 v 1 to 14**

I wonder if it might just be possible that some of us have been to an event and wondered why another person has been given a better seat than us. We might say ‘what have they done to deserve such a seat of honour?’ Luke returns to the meal scene and, again, it’s at the house of a Pharisee and it’s on the Sabbath. Over the nearly 200 years of their existence, the Pharisees had built up a huge collection of laws that they insisted should be observed on the Sabbath day. Legalism aptly described their attitude to life.

It is one of several Sabbath narratives. What will the Pharisees do with the evidence of God’s power that Jesus provides through his healings? By the end of this account, they are silent. But their hearts are hard and they do not believe in Jesus.

1. Where do you find people whose hearts are hardened towards Jesus?

Do you know why they are not receptive to Jesus’ message?

What modern equivalents to Pharisees have you come across?

This passage is in three sections. Firstly, there was a healing in verses 1 to 6. Verse 1 tells us that the Pharisees have their eye on him to pick up anything they can challenge. But clearly Jesus is going to places where he will be challenged. This is not the first time he has dined with a Pharisee. (see Luke 7:36 to 50). Jesus takes the initiative and asks the Pharisees if it is lawful to heal such a person on the Sabbath. Like the story in Luke 7 the man with dropsy (some kind of fluid retention) was probably an observer who came to see a famous man. (again, like the woman in Luke 7)

1. Jesus’ point is that compassion should be shown whatever the day of the week. He reminds them they would rescue an animal so why not help a human being.

Although we cringe at denying love and care to a needy person can we become legalistic about what we might do on a Sunday?

Is there ever a case for doing that – do we keep the ‘Sabbath day holy’ as Jesus commanded.

Should we ‘***shop***’ on a Sunday or is that legalism? (Please replace ‘shop’ with anything that will promote discussion)

The repetition of these miracles may appear boring but the Pharisees are not getting the message. Jesus wants them to have hearts that are softer and more caring. They are not understanding the teaching of Jesus and the way it affects the way you live.

1. Do we say enough about the way Jesus’ teaching should shape the values of our society?

Have we, in the UK, drifted so far from Jesus’ teaching and values that our attitudes are hardening?

Is this reflected in the way we are dealing with refugees?

Are we a compassionate society?

The second half of this passage deals with Jesus’ views on humility. See Proverbs 25:6 & 7 where it is said to be better for the host to call you forward to a better place than for anyone to seek higher status. He is pointing out that God loves people who are at every point on the social ladder.

1. Can we easily drift into thinking that, in the church, certain people are more worthy of higher status than others?

The seats of honour were always nearest to the host but often the most honoured guests arrived the latest. (the Royal family always arrive last at a state occasion).

Do we ever think that we are more worthy of prominence or recognition – be honest !!!!

Jesus’ point is that everyone in the Kingdom is equally recognised and loved by God. Some have roles which put them into prominent positions (e.g. leadership) but, in terms of their relationship with God, we’re all the same.

1. How does this idea clash with the values of our society?

How should we deal with the person who seems to glory in their own status?

Do we sometimes give greater status to people who have achieved much in the secular world?

Jesus gives his point added punch in verses 12 to 14. He suggests that, when you set up a meal, don’t invite friends, neighbours and relatives but invite ‘the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind’. The best hospitality is that which is given, not exchanged – then divine commendation will come.

1. What are the implications for us?

Should our meals be simpler?

Who should we invite?

Are we using meals simply to reinforce existing friendships or for making new friends?

**Who could you invite for a simple meal tomorrow?**

**Ask God to help you stop seeking any status or recognition.**