

Christward

The magazine of



September – October 2022

- Church Rules Apply -

Luke 14: 7-14

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Luke 14: 7-14 is one of the passages I seem to have heard preached on a lot over my life in the church – and yet, the first half doesn't apply to any formal occasion I've ever attended, where there has always been a seating plan, and usually little name labels on the table as well, to make sure you can't sit where you're not supposed to. So the story isn't addressed to a situation any of us is likely to encounter ourselves – that can't be why it's popular. I have also never heard of anyone throwing a party – of the proper party sort – for only the disadvantaged, so the second half seems to

be regarded as generally inapplicable and glossed over, like many of the more difficult sayings of Jesus.

The nub of this passage for preachers is usually the verse in the middle – *For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.* The problem is that this is often presented as stick and carrot – arrogant people will get their comeuppance, but if you are ever so humble, you'll get a nice reward. This can very easily sound like an incitement to hypocrisy – it doesn't matter what you want to do, as long as you actually do the thing that makes you look modest. In other words, it makes you self-conscious about how your behaviour looks to others. Once instilled, it is extremely difficult to dispel self-consciousness about one's public behaviour, and this one and other stories have been well absorbed into the conduct of generations of church attenders, resulting in what we tend to refer to in our house as Church Rules. A church event hosted in accordance with Church Rules is a Typical Church Do.

On the plus side, Church Rules mean that anybody here can visit pretty much any mainstream Protestant church and fit in without any problem. On the minus side, people with no previous awareness of Church Rules can become uncomfortable, sensing that there is some code to the interactions of the congregation that they don't understand.

What sort of thing am I thinking of here?

- A degree of deference to others and constant smiling which the vicar and writer Giles Fraser referred to in the context of an Anglican synod a few years back as competitive niceness, bad jokes and unfeasible compliments.
- *Praise and compliments in Church are weird... The amount of thanks and praise often seems inversely related to the actual quality or amount of work actually involved. More related to the perceived need of the particular person for support – and that perception itself is often wrong! I find it very hard to take compliments seriously in a Church setting as the currency has been so devalued over the years...*

- Not being showy about money or possessions. This is different from not actually having any. My experience in the legal profession enables me to say with confidence that quite a lot of people who are

flash with money have a lot less of it than others who don't parade it.

- *..and similarly with brains! I often am led to think that people leave their brains at the door when they come into the building. People who can organise and participate in the most complex operations in their work lives become incapable of listening to or following the simplest of instructions when inside a church building.*

- Yes, all the niceness somehow doesn't involve a lot of listening. I was buying something a while back at a church fair trade stall.

"Would you like it in a bag?" asked the very nice lady. "No, it's fine, I'll put it in the one I've got with me," I replied. She then put it in a bag. At a Typical Church Do, at least two people will be trying to do one simple job, and something else more important will be overlooked altogether.

- *Muddle is somehow considered endearing – it's not, it's incredibly frustrating for those who are trying to organise things!*

- Then there's expressing doubt and hesitation and wrapping things up even when talking about stuff which is quite factual. And not offering something as your own opinion, but attributing it to nameless others. Some of us well remember the comments which started, "Some of the older people..." After a while as Church Secretary, I became aware that this mindset was leaking into my work correspondence – I was writing "I think" when I should have been saying "this is the position". At work I was paid to know what I was talking about. At church it somehow felt rude to be too confident.

- *Yes, even the simplest of things are wrapped up and expressed with diffidence. Visiting another church recently we observed that the door stewards (yes they still have these) were wearing masks, so we asked if this was still their practice. "It's up to you... we have some here if you want..." – holding a box out. It was clear when we walked in to the worship space that they had decided*

they had a vulnerable congregation and consequently that they should still keep masks and distance. So why didn't they just say so?

- Any catering will involve those little buns that you can't buy in the shops any more. This can also be part of a Typical Church Do.
- *Along with half strength orange squash and the cheapest, nastiest instant coffee...*
- We could go on!

But we move with the times! The Typical Church Do has now moved online! I'm sorry to say that a recent Anniversary service for a national charity, online from a famous church in July, proved what happens when Church Rules meet technology. The event was being broadcast on Zoom, and the Zoom host didn't seem quite sure what was going on. As it turned out, neither was anybody else. I would have thought that after more than 2 years of Covid, the people at the famous church would have had a fair amount of experience of Zoom, but if they had, it didn't show.

It started with horrible loud noises, but they did get that sorted. Then it became clear that either the congregation hadn't been miked up properly, or the mikes weren't switched on and off when they should have been, so the singing was hard to hear, and the responses to the responsive prayer were totally inaudible, making it unintelligible to anyone who hadn't got a full copy of the order of service to hand. Throwing in a normal type of careless mistake, the presiding minister didn't turn over the page in a reading of a modern version of the Lord's Prayer, so stopped just over half way through and walked off.

The Director of the charity was an island of professionalism in this sea of incompetence – his contribution came over well. I expected at the end of it that the Zoom host would be full of apologies, as it could and should have been so much better to join online. But she didn't. She said it was wonderful and inspirational and invited us all to agree with her. I just logged off.

Gwyneth Heritage Roberts from the Service on Sunday 28th August

~ Snippets of Hebrew ~

A Parable

In Genesis there is a strange encounter between Jacob and Esau when they meet again after twenty years or more apart. Jacob is concerned that Esau will still want to take revenge for being tricked out of his birth-right. Is this account a parable?

When Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal son, he was following in the traditional practice of describing human nature as having two sides, one good and one bad. The parable was therefore really about the father. His two sons were the two sides of his own nature. When Jesus started with the words “There was a man who had two sons”, everyone thought they knew what was coming.

Certainly, the parable headed in the right direction to start with, when the not so good side of the Prodigal son’s character emerged. Perhaps the resentment of the older son hinted that the parable might be going off course. But it seems the idea that God is watching and waiting to forgive and that he might even be pleased that the prodigal went off and fell flat on his face, points to something different. If as a result the younger son had gained an insight that meant he would be wiser if sadder, was a wonderful result. Incidentally it invites a pause for thought about the role of sacrifice in the repentance and forgiveness process. God was clearly delighted with the end result.

Now there was an earlier story about a man who had two sons. Isaac had Jacob and Esau. Esau was a hunter, and Jacob a dweller in tents. Isaac loved Esau and the game he caught and cooked. Rebekah loved Jacob. The boys were even in conflict in the womb. Esau married a woman from the local area and displeased his parents. Jacob was a trickster. Jacob had to flee to his ancestors

and find a wife, or two, there. This is beginning to look a little more complicated than the usual parable.

Jewish tradition suggests that the story of Jacob and Esau is about a bit more than identifying different aspects of our nature and how we might deal with them. One interpretation suggests that in the story are clues about different ways of pursuing the spiritual side of life. Esau's approach was to make things happen. Jacob's way was to let things develop. Certainly, it was something to struggle over.

Both brothers want to pursue the blessing of the birth right, in a system of primogeniture. The story does not mean that there is only one prize and there is an inevitable struggle for it. It means that the struggle in life is something all can participate in and win. But it does suggest they are pursuing higher things in life.

Jacob wants the story of human development to be an internal integrated personally challenging process. He is looking for an internal transformation by his own effort until the ordinary becomes Godly. Esau will go out and capture it.

After Jacob had fled from Esau and had two wives and a family and an abundance of flocks and herds, he was reunited with Esau. Esau wanted Jacob to go with him, but Jacob said No, I have tender young flocks, you go ahead, and I will carry on more slowly. Where did Esau want to go. Hebrew literature being sparse on detail results in all sorts of speculation. The writer or writers might have dropped this question in as a clue to the reader they were hinting at something deeper, as so often seems to be the case.

Jacob thinks that there is no race involved in pursuing the paths of peace.

When the text say Jacob crossed the river Jabbock, this is a literary device to indicate that he is a changed man. The name of the river has the same letters as Jacob, but put into a different order. This is even more obvious in the Hebrew than the English. Immediately after crossing the river, he wrestles with an angel and is given a

different name. Another clue to him being a different man. That was just in case you missed the first clue. The whole point of this section of the family history centres around becoming a changed person and pondering where one is going in life. Which is probably what set the writers off on this track in the first place, because of its significance in the foundation of their nation. Wrestling with God is what God wants. Abraham and Moses did it. Abraham argued with God about how many righteous people he might destroy in Sodom. Moses argued that God should think about the neighbours and how bad he would look if he destroyed Israel and started again with him. I think Moses had Noah in mind and understood how futile this would be anyway. Moses perhaps thought this point was lost on God, and he needed to be reminded.

When Jacob eventually encounters Esau, and offers him gifts, Esau tells Jacob he has enough goods and is not inclined to accept his present. The two face each other as equals in every sense. Have they both reached a satisfactory position in life but by different paths? Since Esau no longer wants to kill Jacob, he perhaps has realised that goods do not constitute progress in life, but relationships do.

Esau then says Let us journey together, but Jacob says he will go slowly lest the flocks perish. You cannot force progress and face things that are too hard too early.

The Hebrew says, "Let us start early on our journey". The translation just says, "Let us go", but the Hebrew means; set off early with great purpose. This conveys a little more urgency. Esau proceeds toward Seir, which means a rough place. Will this be symbolic of his life? Who knows? Nothing more is said of him. We don't know how he fared afterwards. As Esau left the text says "So he returned" and went toward Seir". The word for return is the word for repent. Maybe embedded in that comment is the idea that Esau had repented of the idea of killing Jacob.

It seems such an odd story. So odd that it isn't a story. We are told nothing about too many things. Where did Esau go and how did

things turn out for him? What became of his wife, who displeased Isaac and Rebeccah? Why do so many things stop in mid flow, with no wrapping up and drawing to a close?

Geoff Walker

~ Church Website ~

Over the past few months we have been slowly working on the Church Website. If you haven't looked recently (or ever!) then do have a look and let us know what you think (<http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/>)

Most of the work has been tidying and updating – most of the important stuff has now been updated, but we still need to tackle the magazine and photo archives.

We have added a section sharing some of the material we have created for our worship (<http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/our-worship/>) – we are slowly adding to this – if you remember something from one of our services you think would be worth sharing then do ask the person who led the service to send it to me and I will add it in (copyright permitting).

There is also now a developing page about the other groups who use our buildings (<http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/groups-meeting-at-union-chapel/>)

And of course, this magazine (<http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/magazine/>) and details of the Sunday programme can also be found (<http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/sunday-programme/>) – although it sometimes takes a few days to get from Alan via myself to the website.

Feedback welcome!

Steve Roberts

~ Worship Pattern ~

As we move towards the post-Covid world we are gradually evolving our patterns of Sunday gatherings towards something appropriate and sustainable for the numbers we have. Bearing in mind the various Church Meeting discussions and decisions, your

Worship Group has met and planned the programme up to Christmas at least along the following lines:

The **first** Sunday of each month will continue as a Zoom-only eGathering as we have developed it over the past couple of years. This is intended as the main focus for our scattered community.

The **second** and **third** Sundays will be in-chapel gatherings with led services and reflections taking the slightly different forms we are familiar with as the leaders are inspired. We are hoping to be able to provide a simple Zoom link so those not able to attend can view the service, but without the complexity and interaction we experimented with since returning to the chapel.

The **fourth** Sunday is our congregation-focussed gathering (not the week to encourage visitors!). We will start with a short communion and move seamlessly into our Church Meeting. We hope that there will be plenty of months when we do not need to discuss formal business and can have discussion together about wider issues we have a common interest in – not just those directly related to the work of the church. This will be followed by a congregational lunch. If there are members who can't attend but would like to be part of the meetings then we would hope to be able to arrange a Zoom link.

When there is a **fifth** Sunday we will not have a conventional service, but other forms of meeting together may be arranged.

Steve on behalf of the Worship Group

~ News of the Family ~

Malcolm Sargent

We heard with sadness that Malcom had died in August. We extend our love and support to Mavis and the family.

Malcolm and Mavis were active members of Didsbury Baptist for many years before moving to live nearer their family.

Beryl Dykes

Beryl has been back in hospital in Wythenshawe but hopes to return to Wellcroft Care home ([75 Church Road, Gatley](#)) very soon.

She has moved from Laurel Court and is comfortable at Wellcroft - she sends her greetings.

**~ Minutes of the Extraordinary
Church Meeting
held at Union Chapel
on 24th July 2022~**

1. **Present:** Margaret G, David G (chair), Carole W, Geoff W, Nicola H, Lorna R, Alan R, Steve R, Gwyneth HR, Beryl Dykes. Susan Marks (nonmember) a Quorate meeting..
(Gwen M on Zoom, but not allowed to vote)

2. **Apologies:** Andy H, Enid W, Margaret R, Margaret E.

3. **Becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)**

Gwyneth Heritage- Roberts (GHR) explained the background to becoming a CIO. The Baptist Union is encouraging churches to become CIOs because it makes it easier in hiring staff and ensures that Deacons or Church Members as individuals do not become accountable if the church should become bankrupt.

In order for the process to continue, the church members must agree the resolution to convert to the CIO model and adopt a new constitution, both of which were circulated by email and post two weeks ago. The process then involves applying to the Charity Commission, which may take up to 80 days before approval.

After that time the assets will be transferred. GHR explained that all members of the church will become members of the CIO and must give approval for the assets of the church (primarily the buildings and monies) to be transferred or held in trust for the CIO rather than the current unincorporated charity. The Church buildings, including the Manse are legally owned by the Baptist

Union Corporation as Trustee for the church, so there will be no conveyancing needed.

There are small changes to the constitution which must be accepted to comply with Baptist Union requirements.

4. Resolution: It was resolved that:

4.1) the members approved the incorporation of the Church as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with a constitution in substantially the form attached;

4.2) at the point of incorporation, the members of the Church will automatically become the first members of the CIO;

4.3) following the establishment of the CIO the members gave authority to the trustees of the Church to effect the transfer of assets (other than property held on separate property trusts), liabilities and activities of the Church to the CIO; and

4.4) following the establishment of the CIO the members gave authority to the trustees of the Church and the property holding trustees (the Baptist Union Corporation Limited) to recognise the CIO as being the Church with the benefit of the property which is held on behalf of the Church including:

- A) Union Chapel, Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester
M14 6EQ and the site of the former Linton House, Wilbraham Road, Fallowfield, Manchester – Title Number MAN111441
- B) 101 Victoria Road, Withington, (M14 6BP) – Title Number LA26258

5. The resolution was agreed unanimously.

The meeting closed at 11.34 am

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting,
Sunday, July 24th 2022
held at Union Chapel ~**

1. **Present:** Margaret G, David G(chair), Carole W, Geoff W, Nicola H, Lorna R, Alan R, Steve R, Gwyneth HR, Beryl Dykes. Susan Marks (nonmember)

2. **Apologies:** Andy H, Enid W, Margaret R, Margaret E., Gwen M on Zoom

3. **The Minutes of the May meeting** were approved with the amendment of GHR's initials at one point and the deletion of the word "commission" in the reference to charity law.

4. **Matters Arising:** Update of GM Commoners – Gwyneth stated that Andy Howes emailed GM commoners (now that their exclusivity period has expired) asking if they are still interested. They say they are but have no plans currently for another meeting with us. Another co-op, MUCH, who we originally spoke to has expressed renewed interest and AH has suggested that we contact them to arrange a meeting.

5. **Date of Next Meeting:** 4th Sunday of the month, September 25th.

6. **New Deacons:** Brenda Marston and Margaret Edmonds have been overwhelmingly elected via an email or phone vote.

7. **Report of Lettings Committee** by Margaret Garner:
The Committee has met and discussed its purpose and function. The Lettings policy document was reviewed but as not everyone had read it thoroughly, all the changes were not made. It is hoped

this will come to the church meeting in September and a lettings administrator will be in post by January, 2023.

8. Church lunches : The resuming of lunches was discussed in detail and agreed that we should have a congregational lunch on the 4th Sunday of the month, Communion and Church Meeting Sundays. All possible members of the church would endeavour to attend a simple meal with a menu that does not detract from the meeting. Catering details will be organised by the deacons. Open Tuesday is an opportunity for the church to interact with others in the wider community.

9. Open Tuesday: Alan R stated that the two Open Tuesday films in July were well attended and he and Andy are planning an autumn program.

~ Church Rules Do Not Apply ~

Over the past few issues there have been a number of articles in which the writers have invited the readers to comment on the views that they have put forward. We had Steve's 'Them and Us' and Andy's 'Jesus the Social Activist? - Please Comment' and in this issue the appeal for views about the Church web site. We also have articles which may not immediately seem to ask for a response such as Geoff's 'Snippets of Hebrew' or Gwyneth's views about the wedding guest parable narrated in Luke 14.

Contributors have put time and effort in writing for Christward and yet they are always met with a resounding silence with regards to their efforts. There is not even a printable "Thank you for your article". This is all the more surprising as when it comes to Church Meetings we are all very vocal on many of the topics which are covered in the magazine.

It could be that we are all much too busy to sit down and write an article on what we have read in the magazine. Also some people

find the idea of writing an article very intimidating. So here is an idea. I would like to introduce into the magazine a section which is the equivalent of the Guardian's 'Letters in Brief'. For those who are not readers of that newspaper and so not familiar with this feature this is how it works. Readers can comment quickly on what they have read in just three or four lines. The contributions can be supportive, critical, humorous, expressing a pithy opinion or simply a plain 'Thank you' if the article has struck a chord. Such contributions can be done quickly, perhaps even immediately after reading the article, and require little time. Just write your remarks on your device and email them to me at alan.redhouse@virgin.net. Church Rules do not apply but, of course, Editorial ones do.

Alan Redhouse

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