

Sparked by the Spirit, unified in our call.

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-13; Luke 14:15-23

It truly is with gratitude that we come together today. Remembering our call to be part of building up the body of Christ. We have heard stories, and there are so many more that we have not heard. People sharing why they are grateful, why they are part of a faith community and how it is they live out their faith in this world. Paul in the letter to the Ephesians urges the people of God to live a life worthy of the calling. Paul reminds us that to live out one's calling, we need to do it with humility and gentleness, while at the same time being patient with one another. We are to do this all while bearing one another in love.

We are so blessed to be part of a beautiful, diverse community – but this also comes with challenges. We need to remember that the person sitting next to us in the pew is here probably for a different reason than we are. The people sitting in front of us and behind us have come here with very different gifts than what we have brought. In the Gospel lesson today from Luke, we are not being called on to provide for the needs of the poor and the disabled. Instead, in this particular parable, Jesus is asking us to *invite all people to dinner*.

We heard through the stories that people shared today the importance of being invited. Each one of us has the ability to invite another. We each have a responsibility to invite one another. This invitation that was extended to the people in the streets was to come in and feast together. It wasn't about status or position. It wasn't about expecting, "If I'm going to host you, you're going to then host me." That is not what this invitation was about. Just because one person gives and participates in the church doesn't mean that the other person then has to give back to us. We offer ourselves freely and openly without expectation.

Did you know that in the New Testament, the Christian scriptures say that *hospitality* literally means "love of a stranger"? When we are invited to the table of Jesus, we are getting a clear sign that every single one of us is accepted, is recognized as an equal, and it's through the breaking of bread together that we come to know one another.

How do we extend hospitality to each other? How do we extend hospitality to this community? Well, today we are doing it in a very practical way: we are going to invite you to be blessed. We are going to invite you to feast together. We are going to invite you to go out into that community

and do the same thing. Let us show this community the spirit of inclusion, belonging, welcome, openness, and diversity. We are truly being called to honour each other. To see the gifts that God has given each one of us. To also see ourselves as a gift. A gift of God. Not in an arrogant way, but in a way that helps us to understand that we have a part to play. We do have gifts to share. That we are each valued and needed. That we are each wanted, and each loved as part of this kingdom of God.

When we hear the story of the Great Banquet, I hope that you hear those words: “And there is still room.” There is always room for more. How do we, as a faith community, make space for all people? How do we keep from putting up roadblocks or placing our own expectations on others? We do this by adopting a spirit of curiosity. When you ask a question, don’t ask a yes or no question; ask a question of inquiry. It’s not about: “Are you new here?” It’s more about: “I don’t know you. Let’s discuss and learn about each other.” We also need to practice patience. This is a challenge for all of us, including me. We need to be patient with one another. We need to remember that people will go at their own pace, when they feel comfortable, and that is okay.

I hope that we remember that we don’t need to be all things to all people. Instead, we need to live in the spirit that believes and trusts that it is *together* that we will meet the needs of all. It’s when everyone shares in the body of Christ that the body of Christ will be well and alive, out in the world, healing and transforming it. As we move into this time of Pride, I want you to know that you are all loved and all precious in God’s eyes. And we are grateful that we are here together, serving the world in love. May our gratitude abound together as we honour one another, this day and in the coming weeks. Amen.