

Easter 6 sermon by Andrew 26 May 2019 Coming home

Acts 16: 9-15; John 14: 23-29

And Lydia said: If you have judged me faithful, come and stay at my home, and she prevailed upon us.

Lydia, with her open, welcoming heart, is the antithesis of that famous and much-mocked Edinburgh expression: “You’ll have had your tea?” Whereas our friends forty miles away in Glasgow have a reputation for a warm welcome that would drag you in off the street, us Edinburgh folk are sadly known for being maybe just a wee bit chilly, a little bit reserved. It’s changing, I think, but that was our reputation.

But Lydia says: Come and stay at my home, and Jesus says: the Father and I, we’ll come and make our home in you. So what does hospitality mean, for us, for people around us, for God?

Well, if hospitality means something about generosity, then we see it first in Paul. He has an open, generous heart, so that when he sees in a vision that man from Macedonia saying “come on over and help us”, he gets straight in a boat and starts what sounds like a complicated journey via all sorts of ancient place names until he gets to his destination. Paul didn’t have a great relationship with boats, so that was generous of him for a start.

In the last few weeks I’ve been asking, a bit like that man from Macedonia, for people to come and help us – if you like for people to help us with the hospitality we want to offer to others. So I’ve been asking all sorts of diocesan people who work in mission or with young people or with buildings or communications (websites and all that). I just met this week with someone who does art projects with local schools and children to explore possibilities with her and as well as that looking to see how our ecumenical neighbours (like our Baptist friends) can help us to be Lydia in this place, as St Salvador’s has always been, but open to how we’re meant to be doing that now and in the future.

Food Bank is a Lydia ministry if you like – it’s a reflection of the hospitality of God. Jesus was always feeding people. Jesus knew, he knows still, that people need not only the Bread of Life, but they need real bread. They need to know they’re welcome to pull up a seat at the table. Time and again Jesus uses the image of a banquet to illustrate what the kingdom is meant to look like. In other words it’s a meal, an act of hospitality where everyone’s welcome.

Just last week lots of people who’ve come to live and work here from other countries went to their polling stations to vote, as they were entitled to do, and were turned away. That’s the antithesis of hospitality. That’s a message that you don’t really belong, that this is not really your home and you don’t belong here. But the kingdom, of which this meal, and Food Bank and everything else we do, they’re all a symbol, turns all that upside down.

For anyone uncertain of their welcome at the banquet of life, Jesus takes them right up the table to the top seats. Hospitality is what it's all about. Messy Church has a meal at its heart too. It's mission and it's hospitality, it's a way of reaching out to folks who maybe aren't too sure about church, or they don't do Church or can't do Sundays. It's Church for folks who maybe wonder: Am I really welcome here? Is there really a place for me? Or is Church so far from anything I'm concerned about that it's just irrelevant? It's also an opportunity for us to offer the hospitality of listening. What are the things that our neighbours care about? What moves them or touches them?

So Messy Church is about offering this hospitable space as somewhere where people can explore and create and have fun and make new friends and no doubt eat lots of pizza.

But the ultimate model of this hospitality is God himself. There's a famous icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev called the Old Testament Trinity. And it shows that famous scene where Abraham entertains three angelic visitors under the oak at Mamre when they come to announce the news that Sarah will have that son they'd longed for but almost given up on. And Sarah busies herself in the best eastern tradition making bread and roasting meat, a feast for the visitors, these strangers from afar. The icon shows the three visitors in absolute stillness and they incline towards each other in this beautiful picture of harmony and mutual love. It's the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But there's a space, a space at the front of the table and it's for you, for me. This is the hospitality of God, who yet again says, come as you are, draw up a seat at the table and share my life. This is the Jesus who says: Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with you, and you with me. This is the love of that Father of the prodigal son who stands at his gate every day, just aching for him to come home.

On Friday night I went with my sister to see the film "Rocketman" about the life of Elton John. The film starts off in his 1950's/1960's home. Only it was never a home. His Dad was distant and cold – "when are you going to hug me?" the little boy, Elton, asks (and he never gets his hug, ever). His Mum was completely self-preoccupied and clearly saw Elton as just an irritation, an inconvenience. So a home in which he was never at home – only his Nan celebrated his amazing gift for music. And beyond that and maybe because of it never at home in himself, with his own sexuality and who he was. A lifelong search for home, for welcome, for love. All of which he eventually found, but the film – sad and powerful and joyful all at once - reminds all of us that home is what we're all searching for.

We will make our home in you, promises Jesus. This is the love that celebrates your gifts, dries your tears, forgives our failures and brings us to the table. Our faith is about being welcomed home.