

## ***God's Hospitality***

Hospitality was central to Jesus' ministry as it's how he touched people's lives in the most unique and profound way. When 5000 people came to hear Jesus speak, he was concerned that they should be fed as well as hearing his words. He wanted them to be fed both physically and spiritually. He regularly shared meals with those considered outcasts and outsiders by the 'regular' population, because he came to show God's love to absolutely everyone – no exceptions!

When Jesus gathered his disciples for 'the last supper' as its now called, he took them by surprise by washing their feet. He then commanded them to '*love one another as I have loved you*'. Loving service to each other is therefore an essential component of worship as it reminds us that we are all sent out to love and serve God by caring for people and creation.

Our Sunday and Thursday morning services have at their heart a Eucharist or Holy Communion where we share bread and wine together because, at the last supper with his disciples, Jesus asked them to '*do this to remember me*'.

Eating and drinking are a basic human activity which is essential to our survival. In the same way, feeding on God's word and sharing in his hospitality of the bread and wine is essential to our spiritual survival and wellbeing too. So both of these have a high priority in our worship.

Jesus' death and resurrection were a long time ago but there were two really significant encounters between Jesus his disciples immediately after his resurrection which give added significance to aspects of our worship now. One happened on a walk to Emmaus and the other was at a breakfast on the beach.

Two of Jesus' disciples were running away from Jerusalem towards Emmaus terrified after Jesus' arrest and execution when they encountered a stranger. This was the risen Jesus, but they did not recognise him even though he opened up the Scriptures to them so that '*their heart burned within them*'. In worship we hear readings from the bible. They are then explained in the sermon; used to inspire our prayers; and give us food for thought to guide us as we journey on.

The disciples only really recognised Jesus as he broke bread with them while they shared their supper with him. When they realised who he was they were transformed from fearful, hopeless travellers to joyful, confident disciples excited by the new life he showed them.

Each week we invite Jesus to our table and he comes to transform us in the power of the Holy Spirit as we receive bread and wine at the communion table. It is a moment of thanksgiving and spiritual hospitality – of guest and host in perfect harmony.

At dawn in Galilee where the disciples were again feeling lost and afraid after his resurrection, Jesus appeared and unexpectedly invited them to *'Come and have breakfast'*. They were amazed to see Him on the beach waiting for them after their long night of fishing. He had prepared fish and bread around a BBQ fire and asked them to bring some of their catch of fish too. Jesus' hospitality had never been more welcome. They shared a special time with him that restored them, gave them hope and set them up for what lay ahead. Jesus' compassion for Peter offered him a lifeline of forgiveness as he asked him *'do you love me?'* This simple question gave Peter the fresh start he needed which enabled him to know he was forgiven. He could now go forward in his life *'to love and serve the Lord'*.

When we worship together, we are at the touching place of God's hospitality. We come as ordinary people carrying a complex baggage of life's experiences with hopes, joys and fears. We come because we belong to God's eclectic, universal family. We come seeking God's peace that forgives, restores, sustains and keeps us hopeful and joyful in our faith journey. We come to thank God for loving us. We come to offer ourselves in humble thanksgiving to receive God's blessing so we might keep the momentum of God's hospitality flowing through us as we go out once more to serve him in our daily lives.

Jesus often said to people *'Come and see.'* So His words of invitation are offered to you too ... you will always be most welcome.

Words from one of our services: *Come to His table, not because you must but because you may; not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come, but because you need mercy and help. Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more. Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you. Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.*