



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Trinity 11 2025

Luke 14 1 & 7-14

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Gospel of Luke has much to say about power, wealth, privilege and status.

It is Luke's Gospel which speaks clearly about the overturning of social order and the upending of misplaced or inherited expectation.

Whenever Jesus is involved in conversations or questions about such things, he will, invariably, turn the tables, and make it crystal clear that whatever the rules and conventions of the present world and its kingdoms might be, in the Kingdom of God, this world's order will be turned inside out and upside down!

Repeatedly, Jesus assures everyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see that in God's Kingdom, those who struggle their way through life now, finding themselves very much below the salt, will come to sit in the very best seats at the top table.

That all sounds very nice, but Jesus never sets out to be just 'nice' at and he warns everyone who comes to him that those who live lives of unabashed luxury now, those who give no thought to the poor, the weak, the marginalised, those who barely exist because they are out of their field of vision, will be the very last in the queue.

Almost every page of Luke's Gospel has this 'watermark' of role reversal. As it says on the green slate stone beneath the window on our new staircase down to the crypt: *"the last will be first, and the first will be last"*.

This great reversal of fortunes begins, for Luke, with the song that Mary sings in the very first chapter of his gospel: after she has given her *fiat* – her unequal yes - to the angel of the annunciation, Mary proclaims that not only does her soul magnify the Lord, but that by choosing her, in the lowliness and poverty of her social status, God has, in effect, broken the ages-long world order into a myriad of pieces: that God, her Lord, *"has shown the might of outstretched arm, he scattered the arrogant, overturned the thrones of rulers and in their place has exalted the lowly, filled the hungry and dismissed the rich as being of no account"*.

A young woman, powerless, insignificant and poor, has been chosen to be the agent through whom God enacts God's eternal plan of salvation - and this sets Luke's theme which he keeps running on every successive page of his Gospel.

What counts in God's eyes, is not social status or the security of a large bank balance, but humility, a knowledge of one's dependence upon God's merciful bounty, and the openness that will allow God to work in and through people so that, the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given water, the naked are clothed, the homeless are housed, widows and orphans are cared for.

Luke keeps driving home Jesus' constant message that the Kingdom of God belongs, not only in what is to come, but what is now; that it belongs to those who are radically free, fully open and totally receptive, like Mary, to placing themselves completely at God's disposal.

What lies at the very heart of today's reading is this: those who are arrogant or proud, those who cannot see just how dependent they are on God's mercy, those who think themselves socially invulnerable; everyone who rests on their golden laurels and are resistant to hearing

what Jesus has say about the true nature of God's kingdom, they will find themselves shut out of the Kingdom.

(If you want to follow a trail through Luke's Gospel to help you discover what Jesus is saying, start with Mary's Magnificat in Chapter 1 and work your way through the Sermon on the Plain in Chapter 6, with its blessings and its woes, keep going through today's story in Chapter 14, the story of Dives and Lazarus in Chapter 16, until you reach Golgotha and the cross of Calvary in Chapter 23, where Jesus is left with nothing, but gains everything through his obedience to his Father.)

Jesus' message carefully narrated and polished by Luke, was probably written to be read by affluent, privileged and well-educated Christians, much like us, and it would have profoundly challenged them, as it still challenges us, who have much of this world's good things.

To everyone, in every time and place, who enjoys a measure of material wealth and social prosperity, Luke's 'Great Reversal' may seem like exceedingly Bad News, not Good News, at all - but here the thing, the Great Reversal is the work of God, the God who acts to set things right, to bring healing and liberation, wholeness and healing in this world and in the next. It is not something that we human beings can accomplish on our own and for ourselves. As Mary said, it is only the Lord who puts down and raises up.

But Jesus' words are always a wake-up call, an invitation to care for the poor, the disadvantaged and the weak; a call to work actively to bring about economic and social justice for all people; to assure us that the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized — everyone who counts for nothing in this world, counts very much in the Kingdom of God, the place where complacency and insensitivity to the needs of others has no place.

Only when we recognise our utter dependence on God, can we, like Mary, like Jesus, like the disciples, like the saints in every age, open ourselves fully to hear God's calling voice inviting us into the Kingdom

of God and the Supper of the Lamb, the Heavenly Banquet, where the last will be first and the first will be last. Amen.



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