

Homily for August 31, 2025

Luke 14:1, 7-14

When I was a fresher (freshman) in biochemistry in England, just a few years ago, I was fortunate to attend a lecture by Hans Krebs who was awarded the Nobel prize in medicine for his work in working out how oxygen-breathing organisms, like us, convert carbohydrates into energy. This process is now called the Krebs Cycle. To attend a lecture by such a superstar in biochemistry was really something. I can remember it well. His first slide was not a picture of his Nobel prize but the letter of rejection from the journal, Nature, for his groundbreaking research. The reviewers said that metabolic pathways went in straight lines not cycles. That was the dogma of the time. He knew they were wrong, but he didn't create a fuss, he just worked harder and collected more data to build an irrefutable case. His message to us was: Never give up, when you prove them wrong, they'll give you the Nobel Prize. But his final slide contained the names of those who had inspired and helped him do the work, it included many undergrads. He talked about how thankful he was for their contributions and support. No ego. No "what a cleverbox am I". For some reason I had been invited to attend the dinner for him after the lecture. I was terrified; I was very shy in those days. What could I say to a Nobel prize winner? Well, he was lovely. He didn't talk about himself, he asked about us, about how our studies were going and was so encouraging. He really engaged with us and made us feel important, worth his time.

Jesus told the host to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to his banquet, in other words, the useless who had no power or anything to give. Well, this might be a bit of a stretch, but undergrads can seem pretty useless, a real annoyance at times,

especially to important, research-focused faculty. But this was not the case with Hans Krebs. He was the first person I met who showed true humility and generosity like Jesus calls us to do. I still remember this more than 50 years later.

I think we can confuse ourselves about what humility is. Is it a personality trait, does it go hand in hand with low self-esteem or is it a deliberate behavior to get out of stepping up: Oh no, I couldn't possibly do that? It's none of these!

For us, as Christians, it's about seeing yourself **rightly** before God and others. It's acknowledging that all we have and are, is a gift from God by the grace of His Holy Spirit. No reason to be full of our own self-importance but not to feel inferior either. Our perfect model, of course, is Jesus, who, we read in Paul's letter to the Philippians, emptied himself and took the form of a slave ... and became obedient to the point of death". Jesus' humility was a voluntary act of sacrifice out of obedience and love for his father. For us too, in the Kingdom of God where the rules governing social standing are turned completely upside down, true humility is also a sacrificial calling, to be willing to sit in the lowest place and practice this radical hospitality.

How do we take this radical hospitality seriously? Jesus is challenging us to be more than just charitable to others, to go somewhere else and hand out the sandwiches for example. Instead, he challenges us to make our tables places of inclusion, equality and engagement. I can think of two ways we have done this at Trinity. A few years ago, there was a program in our basement teaching English as a second language to recent immigrants who came with their children to the classes. We hosted a potluck for them; we all prepared our favorite foods and then sat together, eating and telling our stories.

That was beautiful. And each week, we are providing space, rent-free, to the Hawks' Helpers program who are helping families in need in Wethersfield. It's a privilege that we have the resources to share in this way.

What more might we do to welcome others into our community? Let's challenge ourselves as we think about refreshing our list of 2025 Goals for the new year. What might we imagine?

This the first week of the Season of Creation: a time when we join with Christians around the world to celebrate our Gospel calling to protect the Earth that God entrusted to our care. How does our Gospel today encourage us in this work?

At the banquet Jesus describes, God is the host. What if the banquet is bigger than we can possibly imagine. What if we read this story not just in terms of our relationships with people, but also our relationship with Creation? What if this banquet table includes all of God's creatures and the Earth itself is our table?

Jesus says, "Do not sit down at the place of honor... but go and sit down at the lowest place." This call to humility is exactly what our world needs when it comes to caring for the Earth. For too long, we have acted as if we own the planet, as if we are the honored guests who get to take the lion's share of whatever we want. We use resources without limits and don't care about the consequences: polluted air and water, destroyed habitats. We forget the Psalmist's words "The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1).

True humility means seeing ourselves as part of creation, not masters over it.

I have really learned this lesson this week. Thanks to the lower temperatures, I have ventured back into my garden. My nice flower beds are a sad, fried mess! While the weeds are flourishing. Gardening certainly teaches me humility. It reminds me that creation isn't here just for me – it has a life of its own. And I am definitely not the master, even in my own backyard.

Jesus tells the host: “When you give a banquet, invite those who cannot repay you.” Caring for Creation is an act of this same selfless hospitality. The Earth cannot repay us when we protect forests, clean rivers, or restore habitats. The rewards are not immediate. Often, the benefits go to future generations we will never meet. Although not always.

A while ago, I heard a talk on beavers (we have beavers in Great Meadows) The speaker described a project to reintroduce beavers into remote areas of Idaho, this was a number of years ago. The beavers had been hunted to extinction and, as a consequence, the water sources had mostly dried up, ecosystems for birds and other animals had broken down. And the lack of water had shortened the growing season in the farms surrounding these areas. This project involved airdropping beavers into these remote places – they were put into little boxes with parachutes attached and pushed out of low flying planes. The boxes broke open on landing, allowing the beavers to run off and do their thing – i.e. find water. Within a few years, the wetlands were re-established, all kinds of life was coming back and, thanks to the more available surface water, the growing season for the farmers was extended by a few weeks. Stories like this give me hope that we can be smart and work with nature to heal our fragile earth. I pray that I

can hear lots more stories like this.

This season is a time for each of us to think about what we might do to protect the Earth. For my part, I have decided to plant one tree in Wethersfield each year. I have read that planting trees is a small but significant way to help the planet. I already have my spot for this year and I'm waiting for the tree to arrive. The Town tree manager is willing to work with anyone who wants to do this – he will even plant the tree for you! BTW a couple of years ago we planted the Hornbean tree out front and, finally, next week, Bishop Gordon will bless it and welcome it as a member of our community. Also , after ten years of procrastination, I'm going solar.

I invite you to think about a plan for yourself, if you don't already have one. Small steps. Perhaps you can avoid purchasing stuff that can't be recycled or start composting or perhaps you are called to join an environmental activist group? How might God be calling you? What might we do as a parish? We're open to ideas.

What we can all do is to commit to praying for our precious planet and all its inhabitants. One suggestion I read, is to pray for a different species of bird or furry thing each day – and definitely to pray for world leaders to make wise choices in the protection and management of the many fragile ecosystems on our planet.

In the Kingdom of God, how we treat people matters, but how we treat the Earth matters too.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, May we live humbly, serve generously and care deeply for this beautiful world that you so lovingly created. In Jesus' name. Amen.