**Hospitality            2 John;      Matthew 25, 31-40**

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”  Isaiah 55,1

Whose is this generous invitation?

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.”  Psalm 24,1

“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines.”  Isaiah 25,6

Our host is none other than the Lord God, the Creator of the world, to whom all things in heaven and earth belong. His hospitality is extended to us by invitation. We are tenants and stewards in His world. We are dependent on Him for food and drink just as the Israelites were in the wilderness. God gave them manna and quails for food and water from a rock to drink. More than once he reminded them (and us) that we are all travellers and sojourners in life and, as He provided for us, so we must treat people with care and refreshment.

“When an alien lives in your land, do not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Leviticus 19, 33-34

God put a duty of care and concern on us, to look after each other: we are all aliens and strangers in God’s world. He set the rules for the hospitality practised in early times when people had to travel on foot through many different landscapes. We see this in the story of Abraham, Genesis 18, 1-16. Abraham noticed three strangers standing near his tent. At once he ran out to greet them, eager to give them hospitality, to be of service to them. He offered water to wash their feet, killed and roasted the fatted calf, told his wife Sarah to bake bread and brought curds and milk. Abraham welcomed these strangers, gave them food and drink, shelter and rest, the comfort of clean feet and was ready to provide care for any animals. He did not seek or expect any reward but that of showing respect and courtesy. Before a year had passed he and Sarah received the blessing of a son. As the writer to the Hebrews says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels unawares.”  Hebrews 13,2

“You prepare a table before me,” says David in Psalm 23, 5. All living things are included in God’s abundance, as Psalm 104, 27-28 says, “They all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.” It is our responsibility and our opportunity to notice the needs of people who pass briefly through our lives and to share with them what God has provided for us. God will judge us according to our reaction to human need, the instinctive reaction of a loving heart. The rule in Leviticus 19, 18 says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.”

 Jesus expanded this into love for all; everyone was welcome at His table. He showed that hospitality was a practical way to love others, to demonstrate kindness, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, humility, to all, whatever their circumstances. “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”  Here is a cautionary tale; Jesus expects us to show the same quality of attention to anyone as we would to Jesus.

Jesus enjoyed hospitality from friends and people he met on His travels. He was a welcome guest at the wedding feast in Cana; He accepted Zacchaeus’ invitation to  a meal; He provided food for the crowds of five thousand and four thousand, He found rest and loving kindness in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus.  He and His disciples relied on the hospitality of villagers and townspeople on their travels and He Himself was the host in an upper room in Jerusalem where He washed His disciples’ feet.

Paul urged people to practise hospitality (Romans 12,13). Peter, in 1 Peter 4, 9 says it must be without grumbling.

John offers a word of caution. Jesus’ last words to His disciples had been, “Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them My disciples.” Matthew  28, 19

Such was the enthusiasm to follow Jesus’ command that travelling evangelists and teachers took the Gospel from place to place and it was customary for local believers to offer hospitality during their stay and make financial provision for their onward journey. But there were those who took advantage of this open-handed generosity to spread their versions of the truth. Among the heresies swirling around was Gnosticism which said that Jesus was a human being until His baptism when the Son of God descended on the human Jesus but left Him before His suffering on the cross so it was only the man Jesus who died. John warned Christians to be on their guard, to be discriminating in offering hospitality to strangers,  against inviting into their fellowships, as it were, wolves in sheep’s clothing.

John ends his Letter by looking forward to a visit to his readers. “I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”

We share John’s hope for we, too, long to visit and talk and share hospitality, show our love in providing food, drink, shelter, protection, kindness, comfort and friendship. We want to accept Jesus’ invitation to the picnic meal by the lakeside,”Come and eat.” John 21, 12,l