



**Longer Tables, Lower Fences - Reflections for Lent 2019**  
**Week 3 – 24<sup>th</sup> March**  
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**The grace of receiving**

It was pouring with rain. The sign outside the church offered free tea and coffee – and a friendly chat. People at this Methodist Church, just outside Bradford had set up a drop in on Friday afternoons when they had seen people queuing outside the doctor's surgery opposite. They realised that some of them were rather vulnerable and might welcome a place to go, so they opened the weekly drop in. I went in and took refuge from the rain. Inside two long trestle tables were set up in a tiny church hall. Someone made me a cup of tea and took me to sit down. I spent the next two hours chatting with people there: women and men, old and young, retired, out of work, healthy and struggling. When my time there finished, I realised that I wasn't entirely sure who was from the Church and who was dropping in.

Being a guest can be quite hard work sometimes. However generous and well-meaning the host is, guests always have to be grateful, always receiving. Is there a danger sometimes that our well-meaning hospitality, our desire to serve, places a barrier between us and the other? Do we serve (coffee) from one side of the table while our guests are seated?

In the Bible we read stories of Jesus giving sight to the blind man, healing the bleeding woman, restoring life to the child. But we also read stories of Jesus receiving – having his feet washed by Mary, having tea at the home of a tax collector, drinking water at the well with the Samaritan woman, receiving hospitality from Mary and Martha. Through receiving, Jesus encounters these women and men, and from this flows forgiveness, sharing of wisdom and a real connection. Can our longer tables enable us to sit for longer, to encounter the other, to be changed by them? Look at the foodbanks where people's stories can be really heard as well as their practical needs met. Community cafes where people of all backgrounds come together to share food and stories. Can longer tables enable us to recognise that we all need to receive as well as to give? Until, like the church in Bradford, we can no longer tell the difference between the guest and the host?



**To ponder:** Why is it easier to be the host than the guest? Are there situations in your life or in your church where a desire to serve might be getting in the way of real encounter. How could you receive?

**Prayer:** Loving God, you have created us to be in relationship with you and with each other. Help us to long for fullness of relationship, to be willing to make ourselves vulnerable, and through receiving from each other, to know more of you. Amen.

**Bible link:** Luke 7: 36-50 – consider who gives and who receives in this story.

**Hymn:** StF 611 Brother, sister, let me serve you – *'Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too'*.

These Lent reflections are written to link with the 2019 Easter Offering Dedication Service, 'Longer Tables, Lower Fences' which will be used by most circuits of the Methodist Church in Britain during the weeks following Easter. Orders of service and other resources can be found at [www.mwib.org.uk](http://www.mwib.org.uk)