

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Devotional Notes

June 2013

Theme: Following in Christ's Footprints

Over the forty years I worked within the Moravian Church, first as a minister's wife, then as a minister, I got to know many people around the world through sharing hospitality. Not all of these visitors were Moravians. When in Jamaica we were often asked to provide accommodation for friends of friends, or people visiting the island for conferences or jamborees. Later, in the central location of Ockbrook in this province, I entertained many who were coming to all kinds of meetings or MWA rallies, and both there and at Bedford was pleased to be able to accommodate quite a number of sisters from Eastern and Western Europe who were invited to share our rallies and retreats. Many researchers also called at Ockbrook, some from abroad who dropped in for a few days often without any warning to see where their ancestors had lived. One lady from Berlin came with a letter written to her great-great-grandfather in the 1830s calling him to serve in the boys' school in Ockbrook! I wasn't able to put her up as I was lying on my back with a slipped disc at the time, but Sr Dorothy Moreton was happy to look after her. I remember Bishop Nicodemo writing from Western Tanzania to thank me for hospitality and saying 'drop in to see me if you are passing this way'. It seemed so unlikely at the time, yet just over 12 months later I did just that on a tour of Tanzania prior to Unity Synod in 1995!

We heard last month how Jesus arrived in Jericho and invited himself to stay with Zacchaeus, whom he had probably never met before, and how this tax collector welcomed him into his home. This month we are going to hear about Jesus being invited to a special supper in his honour at the home of his friends in Bethany, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. **Please read John 12:1-11.**

Immediately after this meal Jesus went up to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, so these were some of his final days, and it must have been a great comfort to be able to stop off at a friend's house and enjoy their hospitality. However the dinner seems to have been rather a grand occasion not just a supper party with friends, and possibly a thank you for the recent raising of Lazarus from the dead, which is recounted in the previous chapter. We see the two women in similar roles to the account of a previous visit by Jesus to their home in Luke's Gospel, Martha is serving at table, and Mary pays homage to Jesus by anointing his feet with very costly perfume. The disciples must be there too as Judas objects to what Mary does, and we have a hint that he is not altogether happy with what is happening. We learn also that the occasion drew a great number of onlookers to Bethany, curious about Jesus and his host too, and that this was the final straw for the Jewish authorities, Here we are told they resolved to do away with them both and put an end to Jesus and his following. They got their way and had Jesus crucified, but they certainly did not manage to do away with him or his followers.

Hospitality and sharing meals with friends and strangers is a prominent feature in the Gospel stories, as well as in the early Christian Church, which we can read about in Acts and in the letters which follow. It was not simply a way of entertaining friends, but also of sharing table fellowship, of getting to know people, to know more about them and their lives, to understand what makes them tick, what concerns them, some of their problems and some of their joys. It was also an opportunity the followers of Jesus to share something of themselves with others and talk about their faith in an informal setting.

Hilary Smith

For discussion

Perhaps members might like to share their own experiences of giving and receiving hospitality and of special shared meals. Is there anything we can learn from these of how we can use such opportunities to share our faith in an informal and non-threatening way with friends and strangers alike?