

The meat is done to a turn, the soufflés are pitch perfect,
the mega feast is ready and waiting: come to the party.

The summons not by email, letter, or phone, but in person.

The great man's δουλος, his slave, his servant
comes knock, knock, knocking on every door, one and all,
and one and all make their excuse: land, ten oxen, a wife,
all suddenly more important than the mega feast.

It seems the great man is not so great after all.

Were it a by-election he'd have scored nul points.

The piqued master commands his slave to immediately scour
the wide roads and narrow lanes, the highways and hedgerows
for the riff raff, the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,
and compel them to come in and fill the house.

A parable of ministry going pear-shaped and bouncing back.

Church life can be very static, building based,
when it should be dynamic, urgent, on the road, seeking diners.

I once got the girls from the local brothel to come
to our posh church in Middlesbrough - that was quite something!
Fed up with Saul, prophet Samuel subversively took to the road,
eventually finding David, the 8th son, my namesake,
in Bethlehem: shepherd, psalmist, sex-bomb and slingsman.
All roads slouch towards Bethlehem...

When I first took to the road, learning to cycle as a curate,
a δουλος, a slave of Christ, I ended up in a fair few hedgerows,
whose owners talked about faith as they soothed my wounds.
Dear Rachel patiently taught me to ride a bike back then,
setting me up to whiz through 40 years of ministry,
inspiring, cheering, challenging,
even setting up a Traidcraft stall
in the porch of Helmsley Church
so you either had to pass by
or include the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind...

Dear Ruth, Hannah and Clare were my star serving team every Sunday at Helmsley when the previous crew walked out because I was in favour of the ordination of women.

‘Girls shouldn’t be allowed in the sanctuary,’ someone barked at Rachel on our first Sunday.

‘What a pity, if only I’d known I’d have given birth to boys!’

I have never been into compelling people, believing that the meal’s quality, the table fellowship should be quite enough.

Atheists are just people whom God hasn’t discovered yet.

He’s got a lot on his plate what with Covid, Ukraine and Boris but don’t fret, he’ll come calling on you one day...

My boss once visited a sheep farm in the Australian outback the size of Yorkshire. ‘Why no fences to keep your sheep in?’

‘Well, 600 miles of fencing would prove a bit expensive, but in the middle of my land is the only well for a 1000 miles.’

I always bought our communion bread from Thicket Priory,
an enclosed order of nuns on the west bank of the Derwent.

It proved the briefest of phone conversations. ‘Good morning,
Sister, could I order 3000 people’s wafers and 100 priests?’

‘Father, we’ll put them in the post for you tonight, God bless.’

My shy dad used to order them by post, but once got his noughts
in a twist and we ended up with 30,000 wafers, with them
spilling out of tea caddies and coffee jars for years – it would’ve
been a surplus of Cana proportions had the nuns made wine!

Whatever, our meal should be mega generous,

the bread being prayerfully made met by our prayer.

All without distinction are very welcome at Jesus’ table.

The Lambeth Conference kicks off at the end of July.

£5000 per bishop, but no same-sex spouses, so no communion.

I have never been into diminishing the quality of that meal

because of those who send their apologies for missing God:

too many clergy tell off folk who come for those who don't.

My 40 years on the road includes over 5000 communions,

none blasé, one and all thrilling because one is always met

by Christ the supreme host, who provides himself

as meat and drink for the feast of all feasts.

Love bade me welcome,
yet my soul drew back,
guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love observing me grow slack
from my first entrance in,
drew nearer to me,
sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

'A guest,' I answered, 'Worthy to be here.'

Love said 'You shall be he.'

'I, Lord, the unkind, the ungrateful,

Ah, my dear, I cannot look on thee.'

Love took my hand

and smiling did reply,

'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord, but I have marred them.

Let my shame go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love,

'Who bore the blame?'

'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' said Love,

'and taste my meat.'

So I did sit and eat.