Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack’d anything.
A guest, I answer’d, worthy to be here:
Love said, you shall be he.
I the unkind, 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 marr’d 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, says Love, and taste my meat.
So I did sit and eat.

The poem above is by the Welsh poet and Anglican priest, George Herbert (1593-1633). It is a poem of deep tenderness, honesty, kindness, and generosity.

Here we find a man, perhaps representing us all, full of the guilt and shame of sin, who draws back when welcomed by Love (God). Love, which lacks nothing, takes the initiative, draws closer, and offers a “sweet” question: “Do you lack anything?” God is always wanting to provide, to give, to help, to heal. This is the nature of true love. The man repeats his unworthiness. Then, taken by the hand (notice Love is smiling), the guest is reminded who he is: created by the very One speaking to
him. Though the man has sinned (“marr’d the eyes”), all is forgiven, and so the man sits, and eats, served by Love itself.

What images, feelings, and thoughts come to mind for you? What strikes me about the poem are four things: (1) The exchange…not only the exchange of words, but the exchange of Love taking the place of sin (“bore the blame”) so that we receive what only Christ deserves. (2) The universality…reaching back to the Garden of Eden (“dust and sin”), and offers an Easter vision of new life when we are welcomed to our eternal home. (3) The feeling…the poem itself is a personal expression of love, a gift to the reader who is told that, no matter what, Love is not about us, but is always for us.

In fact, Love is always turning towards us, inviting us still — even these our marr’d souls. God’s light and love and give us what we cannot give ourselves, the gifts to become who God created us to be: beloved lovers. Finally, (4), notice the absence of anger and judgment in this poem. May the words of George Herbert be a reminder of God’s gracious invitation to you: Come, sit, and eat.

—Pastor Peter

**Prayer:** Thank you, dear Lord, for invited me to the table of your love, welcoming me as your forgiven guest, your beloved child. Amen.

**Music Links:**


*Love Bade Me Welcome* (1911) — Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958, English), from *Five Mystical Songs*. Jamie Hall, Baritone.

Hear the poem read by Robert Newton, and here by Edmund Matyjaszek