

Hosting Change

By Karl Inge Tangen

We are often desperate for change in our organisations. We want to make it happen. But however hard we try, we cannot force people to change. As leaders and facilitators, we could learn from the example of Jesus, who invited and 'hosted' change processes. In Luke's gospel Jesus is either going to a meal or coming from a meal (Karris 2006) and his teaching takes place over a meal (Donahue 1990). In the famous parable (Luke 14:15-25), Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a feast. God is the host that invites not only the rich and powerful, but also the poor and the outcast to his party. The Catholic theologian Brendan Byrne talks about the 'transforming hospitality of God' as the focal point of the whole gospel.

- *So what do the images of hosting and hospitality bring to your mind?*
- *What are the implications for you as a leader or facilitator of change in organisations?*

Five elements that strike me are that they involve:

1. Inclusive and friendly
2. Feasting and fun
3. Cost and service
4. Parables and questions
5. The transforming hospitality of God

Inclusive and friendly

Jesus hosting was radically inclusive and also unexpectedly friendly. By eating with outcasts Jesus establish a relative egalitarian relationship with people who not welcomed elsewhere. His request to Zaccheus showed his compassion for the excluded (Luke 19). In the parable of the feast the master invited the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (Luke 14). He invited others to the process, but they had free will to put their self-interests first and refuse to change. When Jesus welcomed the prostitute in the house of a hostile Pharisee (Luke 7: 36-50), he created a safe space for her and gave her a profound sense of human dignity and self worth. He goes even further to not only proclaim human dignity, but celebrate it by throwing at least three parties (Luke 15 v.6, 9; 24).

Questions to ponder:

- *How do I invite, listen to and show radical respect to the marginal, the quiet ones, the unlovely ones in OD processes?*
- *How do I make sure that people feel welcome and safe in the organisational processes I am a part of?*

Feasting and fun

The kingdom of God is described as a 'feast' in Luke 14, echoing the words of Isaiah (25:6 and 8):
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...

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

The parables in Luke 15 emphasise the importance of celebration often with the best available food, music and dance. Elsewhere in Luke (21:4) Jesus moves beyond the extravagant and praises a poor woman who gave the only thing should offer to the temple. The narratives as well as those the passages

that describe the preparation of the Passover meal (Luke 22) suggests that there practical excellence, but not perfectionism, in the way Jesus organises transformational hosting.

Questions to ponder:

- *How do I bring celebration into OD, rather than simply looking at problems?*
- *How could I use meals, friendship and points of festivity constructively in an OD process?*

Cost and service

Yet, the party has also its costs. Elsewhere, it is clear that Jesus must sacrifice his life to restore this dignity to all men (Luke 22; Mark 10:45). Jesus then is portrayed both as one who delights in the joys of table fellowship with his friends and also as one who serves and sacrifices compassionately for others. His example is one of servant leadership. Overall he models a wide range of relational qualities that creates a space for people to change. Sacrificial love, compassion, forgiveness, enjoyment and authentic friendliness are all important virtues in Jesus' transforming practice of hosting.

Questions to ponder:

- *How do I need to serve in this situation?*
- *What costs am I prepared to pay to host change in this situation? Costs to my reputation? My time? My peace of mind?*

Parables and questions

Jesus used provoking questions and narratives to stimulate new thoughts and behaviour. He did not go in for small talk, but asked big questions and held people accountable for their answers.

Jesus was a transformational storyteller. Jesus moved eloquently in and between different ways of communicating. In sermons he casts a revolutionary new model of God's kingdom, that both blesses the poor in the Spirit, and also demands a new vision of human life that calls people to love, even their enemies (Luke 6:20-49). At meals however he often used other approaches. He asked annoying questions (Luke 7:40 ff), used metaphors, and told unclear parables that provoked people to think in new ways (e.g. Luke 14 and 15). These parables left people in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease their minds into active thought.

In modern terminology, Jesus was not only visionary teacher, he was also a stimulating facilitator that enabled people to embark on a reflective journey of discovery. Yet, he moved beyond intellectual stimulation. Jesus held the listener accountable, and he called for meaningful choices that inspire transforming action (Luke 6:46-49).

Questions to ponder:

- *How can I use powerful and radical questions and hold people to account for their answers?*
- *Are there useful parables I could develop to help confront common OD issues?*

The transforming hospitality of God

Brendan Byrne the Catholic scholar suggests we use the 'hospitality of God' as our focal image for the gospel. He uses the example of Jesus' visit to Zaccheus (Luke 19: 1-10) and the consequent transformation of both Zaccheus and the community to which he is restored to show that:

This is what his whole mission is about. The marginalized one who has given hospitality to Jesus finds himself drawn into a much wider hospitality, the transforming hospitality of God (2000).

Jesus brings in a spiritual dimension to change. (Spirituality being defined as the way people relate to the sacred). Jesus claimed to be hosting the presence of God (Luke 21,31; Mark 1,15; Acts 10:38). This presence adds an extra dimension of power. As people encounter Jesus, they encounter God's inclusive compassion, as they listen they encounter God's powerful words, as they celebrate life with Jesus they encounter the transformational presence of God's Spirit. What is both encouraging and exiting is that this presence can be anywhere where people serve in Jesus name (Matt 18: 19-20). It follows that leaders and OD facilitators can invite the Holy Spirit to do his transforming work in the practices that they host. What an exiting and challenging privilege ...

Questions to ponder:

- *How can I engage with the transforming hospitality of God in an organisation?*
- *What difference would it make if I saw myself as a servant who hosts people and also the presence of God in processes of change?*
- *How might I turn the goals of a contract into prayers for God's work?*