“Who is the greatest?”

Reading Luke 22.24-27 ecologically

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Ecological communities are more-than-human (other-than-human and human) communities. As such Christian communities are already ecological communities in that they are comprised of humans in relation to many other than human entities (especially those that sustain our lives and worship, for example, and even the bacteria that inhabit our bodies). This article uses the notion of ecological communities as a lens though which to interpret the concept of serving in Luke 22.24-27, within the wider narrative context of Luke–Acts. It offers an ecological reading that appeals to the principle of interconnectedness, the ecological hermeneutic of suspicion, and the ecological texture of the text, the latter with particular reference to habitat and the senses. The article situates the question of greatness and the affirmation of ho diakonon (the one serving) not only as these pertains to interhuman relations, but also, more importantly in relation to the wider ecological communities in which human relations of power are situated.

My founding assumption for reading biblical texts ecologically is that we as human beings are facing grave challenges that appear under the headings of anthropogenic (human-induced) climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, desertification and deforestation, to name only some. How we respond to these challenges as human beings may involve, especially for inheritors of western cultures, a rethinking of how we see ourselves in relation to the rest of creation, a creation of which we are part. For Christians, this rethinking

1 This article is a revised version of a paper given in the forum “Christian Communities and/as Ecological Communities” at the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools, Auckland, New Zealand, 29 June to 2 July 2013.

2 In this article I will shift between using the language of Earth and the religious language of creation. There are sound arguments for, and critiques of, both usages. Using the language
has particular resonances. For example, we have at hand a notion of *meta-noia*, change of heart, that Pope John Paul II invoked when he spoke of an “ecological conversion” in his General Audience of 17 January 2001: “We must therefore encourage and support the ‘ecological conversion’ which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading.” The appeal to “ecological conversion” was not primarily a call from Rome for Christians to be converted in their relation to the community of Earth, though it was also this; rather it was first a recognition that in the wider society there were already signs of a change of attitude with respect to human place in the Earth community of which we are inescapably part. This “ecological conversion” involves not only a change of behaviour but also a kind of cultural change, that involves changes in worldview, in how we understand what it means to be human. For humans who are also Christians this includes a realisation that our Christian communities are also already ecological communities, by which I mean that they are more-than-human (other-than-human and human) communities. They are comprised of humans in relation to many other-than-human entities (especially those that sustain our lives and worship, for example, and even the bacteria that inhabit our bodies).

Our lives as human beings, as individuals and communities as well as at the level of species, therefore, are enmeshed with the lives and being of other-kind – both those we understand as living (e.g., fleas, whales, and eucalypts) and those we understand otherwise (e.g., glaciers, sand, and air). This recognition at the very least calls into question pure notions of human pre-eminence over other creatures. Those Christian theologies that draw on certain of Earth is a way of bringing to the fore that which has been neglected or taken for granted, by retrieving a proper name for Earth. It risks, however, continuing to characterise Earth and humans as separate, and needs to be nuanced by reminders that humans, as individuals, communities and species, are part of the multiplicity of constituents that make up the Earth community (from rocks and mountains, to deserts and oceans, rainforests and the many varieties of insects, fish, birds, reptiles, mammals, plants, viruses and bacteria that inhabit these in complex interdependencies). To speak of creation allows for an understanding of humans and other than humans as sharing the quality of creatureliness, that is, of being creature/s. However, it risks shifting the focus to a creator God situated in a biblical past without adequate attention to the critical contemporary plight of Earth and its ecological communities. See, the discussions of these points in David G. Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Method and Prospects for the Future”, *Colloquium* 46, no. 2 (Nov 2014): forthcoming, and Elaine M. Wainwright’s response to Horrell in the same issue.


4 Val Plumwood explores this carefully in relation to a master-slave paradigm, showing that while the master may appear to be superior, the master is always dependent on the slave. Val
readings of Genesis 1 and dualistic philosophical frameworks, and to some extent the notion of the great chain of being (though this has both vertical and horizontal aspects), however, have often been underpinned by notions of human supremacy over other creatures. Nonetheless, when we look at the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, we find another paradigm for relationship between humans and the rest of creation, a model that arises from the image in Genesis 2.15, where the human being formed from the ground is commissioned to serve and keep (or preserve) the garden of Eden. For Norman Habel, “[i]n Genesis 2, humans were created from Earth for Earth. Earth was not created for humans!” Is there a basis for preferring this depiction of humans in Genesis 2 over that in Genesis 1? For Habel there is; he invokes “the way of Jesus,” which he argues is a way of “serving rather than dominating” that “stands in clear tension with the mandate to dominate in Genesis 1.” While I wish to eschew Habel’s move toward a supersessionist invocation of this biblical critical, or Christological, principle, I am interested in the way the notions of supremacy and service, as they appear in Luke 22.24-27, might be understood from an ecological perspective. My purpose in this article is not to explore the passage as it might contribute to the sort of christological principle Habel proposes, but to consider Luke 22.24-27, which seems to refer only to interactions or exercises of power between humans, in the context of an ecological understanding that human communities are never human-only communities. Human communities, such as that of the Lukan Jesus and the disciples gathered around him, are already constituted by a network of relationships with other creatures, only some of whom are human.

I am not claiming that either the first century CE writer of Luke–Acts, or the early hearers and readers of the text, would articulate an ecological understanding in this way. What I am claiming is that the interrelatedness of hu-


7 Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, loc. 1787 of 2907.

8 Habel uses the word “supersedes” expressly in this regard. See Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, loc. 1787 of 2907.
humans and other Earth beings was part of the reality of human lives in the first century CE (in ways both similar to and different from today, however this interrelatedness may have been understood, assumed or even ignored among the writer and early Christian readers of Luke), and that this reality is relevant to readings of texts, such as Luke 22.24-27, that seem to deal predominantly with human–human relationships.

**Reading ecologically**

The ecological approach I take in this article is fourfold. First, I affirm the Earth Bible principle of interconnectedness – “Earth is a community of inter-connected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival” – and bring this principle to my reading of Luke 22.24-27, through the notion of “ecological communities” described above. Second, I apply the ecological hermeneutic of suspicion, that “the text is likely to be inherently anthropocentric and/or has traditionally been read from an anthropocentric perspective.” Third, I work with the ecological texture of the text, particu-

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10 The six Earth Bible principles are intrinsic worth; interconnectedness; voice; purpose; mutual custodianship; and resistance. See Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24.

11 Norman C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics”, in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (SBL Symposium Series 46; Atlanta: SBL,
larly the notions of *habitat* and of the senses as mediators of the materiality of the text.\(^\text{12}\) Drawing on Timothy Morton, Elaine Wainwright says: “Ecological reading seeks to break the distinction between foreground and background, between human/divine story and the more-than-human habitat so that they can become ‘mutually determining.’”\(^\text{13}\) Fourth, I explore what the question the text poses concerning the *one serving* might suggest in the framework of an Earth community.

Coming as part of the farewell or supper discourse at Jesus’ last meal before his death, Luke 22.24-27 reads:\(^\text{14}\)

> But there was also a dispute (or competition, *philoneikia*) among them, as to who was to be regarded as the greatest (*meizon*). But [Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over them and those in authority over (*hoi exousiazontes*) them are called benefactors (*euergetai*). But not so with you; rather the greatest (*ho meizon*) among you must become like the youngest (*ho neoteros*), and the one leading (*ho hegoumenos*) like the one serving (*ho diakonon*). For who is greatest (*meizon*), the one reclining [at table] (*ho anakeimenos*) or the one serving (*ho diakonon*)? Is it not the one reclining (*ho anakeimenos*)? But I am among you as one serving (*ho diakonon*).”

A close look at the passage reveals three key literary features:

1. Only the Lukan Jesus speaks directly. The dispute (or competition) concerning who might appear to be the greatest is narrated. In a passage about leadership and the exercise of authority, Luke’s Jesus takes the lead; he has authority to speak.

2. The rhetoric of Jesus’ speech is important; for example, the effect of questions such as, “who is greater/greatest?” and “is it not?” needs to be considered. The reader or hearer needs to think about the force of the rhetoric; is the rhetoric asking the hearer to affirm that the one reclin-

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ing (at table) is greater? Or is the hearer being pushed to question the basis of greatness, not as a reversal (reclining/serving), but in a different framework entirely? The contrast greatest/youngest rather than greatest/least needs also to be noted.

3. The function of repetition is significant. There are two striking repetitions for such a short passage: *meizon* (the comparative greater or superlative greatest) appears three times (vv. 24, 26, 27); *ho diakonon* (the one serving) appears three times, almost as a refrain (vv. 26b, 27a, 27b).

**The principle of interconnectedness**

In the context of the meal that begins at 22.14, the question of greatness is reframed in relation to serving at table (22.27). In the hierarchical framework of master/slave, which Luke both assumes and challenges, the master is the greater and has power over the slave. But as ecophilosopher Val Plumwood points out this is only so because the master denies her or his dependence on the slave. Master and slave, self and other, human and other-than-human creatures, are interconnected in often complex relations of mutual interdependence. The answer to the rhetorical question, “who is greater: the one reclining or the one serving? is it not the one reclining?” might be heard as holding at least a hint of irony and an invitation to recollect what is the complex network of relations of agency and labour, on which the ability to act as a ruler, as one reclining, depends. The one reclining depends not only on the slave who serves (or attends) at table – or as John Collins points out the youngest as “from Homeric times it was the Greek ideal that youths should honour their betters in age by waiting on them” – but also on the many others (humans and other than humans) whose lives and deaths make possible the hospitality of the meal. The hospitality of the meal stands in for the divine hospitality extended both in creation itself and in the person of Jesus through compassion, forgiveness, and liberation from debt. There is a kenotic hos-

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16 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 48–49.


18 On this theme of hospitality in Luke, see Byrne, *Hospitality of God*. With particular reference
pitality, exemplified in the Lukan breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup, that is a paradigm of the way sustenance occurs through processes of hospitality and sacrifice in the Earth community. Michael Trainor establishes multiple links between the body of Jesus and Earth in his reading of the Lukan birth narrative (2.1-20): for example, through the Earthy materiality of the swaddling cloths and the manger, that enfold the newborn child (as the burial cloths and tomb will later surround his corpse), the presence of the shepherds, and the promise of peace on Earth that accompanies his birth. When he comes to discuss the supper in Luke 22.14-20, Trainor is emphatic about the connection between the action of Jesus and Earth:

Jesus’ meal is rich in Earth symbolism. He acts and speaks over bread; he makes the bread symbolically and metaphorically identical with his physical body, and his body with Earth. The identity in turn evokes cosmic and universal connections with which bread and his body are linked. Here is an Earth-centred high point in the gospel, the gospel’s ecological crescendo to Luke’s narrative symphony. What happens to Jesus’ body identified with the bread will mirror Earth.

For Trainor, this high point that is carried on through the memorialisation enjoined on the disciples in 22.19c, “do this in my memory,” effectively eclipses “Jesus’ announcement of the act of betrayal and the disciples’ faction-fight that now breaks out at this final poignant, deeply ecological meal (22.21-27)”. Trainor does not discuss these apparently discordant notes further; but, given the meal setting in particular, the principle of interconnectedness applies here. With an ear to the ecojustice principle of interconnectedness, I suggest we read the question “who is greater: the one reclining or the one serving (attending) [at table]?” in a wider frame where the hospitality the one at table enjoys is impossible without the one serving, and that this service of to the hospitality of the meal, see John Paul Heil, The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach (Atlanta: SBL, 1999).


21 Trainor, About Earth’s Child, 270. It needs to be recalled that bread already represents a complex of relationships of more-than-human processes of sustenance and labour, including the activity of birds or human farmers planting the grain; the work of sun, rain and soil to feed the growing grain from which the flour is milled through human labour; the human labour to combine flour, water, seasoning and oil, and to knead and bake the loaves.

22 Trainor, About Earth’s Child, 271.
hospitality is a more-than-human act. That is, the one serving is not one but many, human and other than human, on which each of those reclining depends.

A hermeneutic of suspicion

We might suspect, however, that the reliance of those reclining on the many more-than-human agents who “serve” them is forgotten by the writer and many readers of the text as they focus on human concerns. Nonetheless, earlier the Lukan narrative offers an image of hospitality to both humans and other than humans (ravens and lilies), that occurs through sustenance (the attention to basic needs: food, clothing and shelter) (12.22-34). But the text tends to elide the way divine hospitality occurs in cooperation with creation (both human and other than human), though, as Trainor argues, at another level Luke 12 presents ravens and lilies as agents in their capacity to respond to divine hospitality. For Luke the sustenance of more-than-human creatures occurs in relation to welcoming the basileia of God (12.31-34). While Luke’s world is not ours, with some translation between ancient and contemporary worlds we might begin to welcome the basileia of God in the hospitality coming to us not from a God separate from Earth but as one working in cooperation with human and other-than-human creatures, as Acts 14.17 suggests.

We are still left, however, with the problematic dispute between the disciples, that seems decidedly human-focused. The notion of dispute or competition (philoneikia) which appears in Luke 22:24 should not necessarily be read in the light of Mark 9:33-37 and 10:35-44 where discussions about greatness reflect poorly on the disciples. In Luke 9:46-48 which parallels Mark 9:33-37, the word translated argument is dialogismos not philoneikia. Philoneikia, competition, might in a Greek context not be understood negatively. Nonetheless, the earlier passage in Luke 9 and the placement of this passage in continuity


with the announcement of Jesus’ betrayal (22:22) suggests some level of criticism or judgment concerning the disciples’ thinking, as do uses of *philoneikia* in the Septuagint and 1 Cor 11:16 which carry the more negative sense of the word. A further contrast with the passage in Luke 9 is also worth noting: in 9:46 the disciples are arguing about who *was* the greatest; in 22:24 the question is who *appears* (*dōkei*; likely “seems to others”) to be the greatest. The slight shift in emphasis should give the hearer pause and should resonate with Jesus’ imperative: “but not so among you!” While culturally the disciples may have been expected to be concerned with how their companions and others saw them, that is not the worldview the narrative enjoins. Whatever may be the appearance, their reality is different. Might this different reality open beyond the anthropocentric focus of their dispute?

Still within an anthropocentric frame, the term benefactor (*euergetai*) appears in the text as an honorific to which the disciples seem to aspire (22.25). “Benefactors,” writes Jonathan Marshall, “expressed their ἀρετή [moral excellence or virtue] through generous acts and were publicly recognised by the beneficiaries of their generosity.” This public recognition, sometimes by way of civic inscriptions, served to motivate benefactors to continue acting generously. David Lull argues that in 22.25 the title is not being used negatively but can be read in the light of Luke’s positive attitude to benefaction and his portrayal of Jesus as a benefactor. Indeed one could argue that the community described in Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32 subsists by way of mutual benefaction, though that may be stretching the meaning of the term. Joel Green makes the point that, while they performed generous acts publicly, benefactors acted according to their own “whims,” rather than distributing their wealth “where needs were generally agreed.” Peter Nelson makes a good case against Lull’s argument; the idea is not to start acting like benefactors, but to recast leader-

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ship as service. The challenge for an ecological reading is to consider such leadership in a more-than-human frame.

The ecological texture of the text

Habitat

“Habitat and in-habituants (the more-than-human),” writes Wainwright, “are inseparable such that ‘habitat’ can function as a key interpretive lens for reading ecologically.” Habitat includes place but is more than place. Lorraine Code focuses on “habitat as a place to know”; she includes “the social-political, cultural, and psychological elements … alongside physical and (other) environmental contributors to the ‘nature’ of a habitat and its inhabitants, at any historical moment.” The linking of habitat and knowledge is particularly important. Humans and other creatures come to know what is sustaining, for example, in relation to the environment in which they live; this environ, or habitat, is not simply the geographic place, but the complex of relationships of climate, sources of food, clothing and shelter, the power relations that affect these factors, and much more. Moreover, habitat both shapes and is shaped by humans. In applying the concept of habitat to a reading of Luke 22.24-27, we might think of the habitats of the characters within the text, the author, and the readers (ancient and contemporary, and all those in between) of the text. For now, I will focus on the habitat of the characters, namely the Lukan Jesus and the disciples.

The setting of the narrative at a meal (22.14) during Passover (22.7, 13) in a large furnished guest room (22.11-12) in the city (of Jerusalem) (22.10) evokes several aspects of habitat. The physical needs for the meal – food, drink, table and benches, and guest room – are provided through other-than-human and human labour and perhaps gift, and signal the complex more-than-human interdependencies of Jesus and the disciples as they inhabit a habitat that is not their usual one: they need the assistance of the man carrying a jar of water and the owner of the house to secure a place for their meal (22.10-12). The Passover setting reminds the reader/hearer of the religious community of which those gathered at table are part, and the costs in general for other than humans of this meal, especially in the reference to the sacrifice of the Pass-

33 Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 293.
The city setting recalls not only the reliance of inhabitants of cities on lands and peoples outside (as well as within) the city for their sustenance, but also on the relations of power that city structures imply, here for example the Roman occupiers and the Jewish aristocracy. These structures of power enter the text explicitly in the reference to kings and benefactors (22.25).

The movement from the meal to the threat of betrayal brings into poignant counterpoint these habitat/inhabitation aspects of sustenance, shelter and power. Luke 22.24-27 arrives in the context of Jesus’ self-gift, as he serves those at table a cup and bread and another cup, his self-gift pointing toward his coming passion and death, a self-gift intimately linked with the expectation of the rule or basileia of God (22.16-20). Into this scene of giving the threat of betrayal, which Jesus announces in verses 21-22, breaks in as a human action to be condemned but also as part of a divine necessity which has echoes both in the passion predictions throughout the narrative (9.22; 17.25; 24.5-7, 25-26) and in necessity of sacrifice of the Passover lamb in 22.7, the sacrifice with which the Lukan Jesus becomes both metaphorically and metonymically linked. At the announcement of his betrayal, the disciples begin to ask one another which of them might be the betrayer (22.23). Then follows the short discourse on the question: “Who is the greatest?”

It begins: egeneto de kai philoneikia. The use of both de and kai is interesting. In the use of de there is a sense of continuity (and perhaps some contrast) with the preceding passage about betrayal, and in kai there is continuity and perhaps also adding to the previous discussion. Donald Senior notes the “penetrating irony” that “the very apostles who were shocked at the possibility of betrayal begin to argue among themselves about which of them was the greatest!” Their anthropocentric focus on their own status in the face of a deeper ill, is not unlike the response of some, if not many, humans to the betrayals inherent in much ecological damage today. That the context of Luke 22.24-27 is a meal suggests that the question of greatness not only looks to table service as a metaphor for wider leadership questions, but also that more-than-human hospitality is integral to the kind of leadership that the Lukan Jesus is both exemplifying and calling forth.

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36 It is beyond the scope of this article to rehearse the arguments for and against whether Jesus actually ate meat at this final meal. For a nuanced approach to the question, see David G. Horrell, “Biblical Vegetarianism? A Critical and Constructive Assessment”, in Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology, ed. David Grummet and Rachel Muers (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 44–59, esp. 46.

Senses

Another aspect of habitat pertains to the physical text itself. The materiality of the text, as it arrives as papyrus, codex, printed book, light on a screen, or sound through air, is intimately entwined with the more-than-human community that makes its production and reproduction possible.\textsuperscript{38} The senses are one way for readers/hearers, especially through sight and hearing, to engage with the materiality of the text. With Luke 22.24-27, I focus on hearing and the way repetition works on the ear. Three repetitions are of particular note. In this short passage, \textit{meizon} and \textit{ho diakonon} are repeated three times and \textit{ho anakeimenos} twice. The repetition works on the body of the hearer to impress meaning. While \textit{meizon} (greater or greatest) is contrasted with youngest and the leader with \textit{ho diakonon} (the one serving), the effect of the repetition is to contrast (and equate) \textit{meizon} and \textit{ho diakonon}. As noted earlier, the contrast that then flows between \textit{ho anakeimenos} and \textit{ho diakonon} calls into question the basis of the hierarchy of served over servant, master or ruler over slave or youngest. What can we draw from this emphasis in the passage for an ecological ethic? I have already hinted that we might see the Earth community itself as the one serving, the one on whom the one reclining depends. But we can take this another way. The Lukan Jesus identifies himself as the one serving.

The “one serving”

An ecological reading of Luke 22.24-27 cannot simply reverse the idea of greatness and say that the least amongst the creatures of the Earth is the greatest, though some may wish to argue this. To do so, would be against the grain of Luke 12.7 where Jesus describes the disciples, addressed as friends, as “of more value than many sparrows”. At another time, I would read this against the grain. Here, working more with the grain of the text, I suggest that Luke 22.26 already unsettles the potential reversal of greatest and least by contrasting greatest with youngest, and so suggesting a shift from a framework of public leadership in v. 25, to a framework of kinship in v. 26. In this framework of kinship, the Lukan Jesus is among the disciples as one serving (\textit{ho diakonon}). What is the manner of his serving? In the local narrative context of the meal, his serving marked by a kenotic hospitality, of bodily, material self-giving. In the wider frame of Luke, this kenotic hospitality is experienced as the visitation of God through compassion and \textit{aphesis} (both liberation from debt and forgiveness; see especially 4.18-19) and the abundance of the messianic feast,

\textsuperscript{38} See further Elvey, \textit{Matter of the Text}. 
which we should not read as unreservedly otherworldly especially in the light of the meal scenes in Luke–Acts. 39 This visitation is also judgment, as a consequence of a failure to actively receive and participate in the divine hospitality. In the following passage (22.28-30), the Lukan Jesus confers on the gathered apostles a basileia. This might seem odd after the previous elevation of the activity of table service. But it is the image of Jesus as one serving, serving at the table of his own self-gift, that forms the context for this conferral, which is made with images of hospitality (they will enjoy the messianic feast; 22.30a) and judgment (they will judge the twelve tribes; 22.30b).

There are at least two worldviews in tension here when the imagery of kingship and the imagery of table service meet. The tension is not entirely resolved, but for an ecological reading we need to recall that worldviews influence not only human–human interaction but the way we imagine and encounter otherkind, and even the way we form our knowledge of otherkind. Do we describe the interplay of creatures and species in the processes of sustenance and provision of other vital needs in terms of competition for survival, cooperation, or something else? 40 Do models of greatness or service predominate? What are the implications for our inhabiting our own habitats for the ways we form knowledge? How might our understanding of the one serving be broadened to account for the complex and often tragic interdependencies that underpin the hospitality of everyday life?

Conclusion

While addressed to those gathered at the meal, the genre of Luke 22.24-27 as a final discourse assumes a broader audience, one that it might call forth to participation in a divine hospitality. Can we as hearers/readers recover the more-than-human mutuality of service that underscores a divine hospitality, for example as mediated through the self-gift of the Lukan Jesus, not simply as marked by unproblematic relations of cooperation but as always etched with the losses that the kenotic gift of such relations implies? Are we to place

39 Thomas S. Moore argues that in Acts (3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), the term pais (meaning child or youth, as well as servant) is a christological title, through which the Lukan Jesus is identified with the servant figure of Isaiah, particularly by way of the language of apheisis (4:18–19, 24:47; Isa 61:1-2a; Isa 58:6c). Moore, “The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaian Servant”, Bibliotheca Sacra 154 (Jan-Mar 1997): 47–60, esp. 41–50, 59. This usage of pais, identifying Jesus with both young and servants, resonates with the appeal to the youngest in 22:26, and highlights the kenotic aspects of this identification where the pais (child or servant) is at the mercy of those with greater power within the ancient household (see, for example, Luke 7:7).

ourselves at some anticipated messianic banquet beyond Earth or to see the promise of a feast as pertaining to the ways in which we receive and offer hospitality now, the ways we receive the gifts of creation as ones serving and as ones reclining, neither one nor the other, but both? Perhaps we judge ourselves by our readiness to imagine ourselves as being served by Earth, as being coagents with Earth in our serving, and as finding ways to extend our imagining of Christian kinship beyond the frame of Christian community to an Earth community. In this community, we may be one of the younger species, a species who might yet learn to be in mutual relationships of service with our more-than-human kin.

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41 It is important here to note that service language is not without its problems, as feminists have pointed out, noting the way in which women’s roles were traditionally circumscribed by service. It would be a mistake to circumscribe the sustaining roles of other creatures similarly. On the different ways of understanding Luke’s depiction of women and service, noting particularly that diakonein is used principally of women in Luke, see for example Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), esp. 83–88, and Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), esp. 99–101.