

PENTECOST 19

11/10/20

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

You invite us to worship, O God, and we rejoice!

We are able to leave the anxieties of our daily lives behind.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we give thanks!

We realize the full extent of your wonderful gifts.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we remember!

We are aware of your love, so graciously shown in Jesus Christ.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we respond!

We are ready to act compassionately and justly, in Christ's name.

Opening Prayer

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there in times of joy, there when the testing times come.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there when apathy grips us, there when enthusiasm is ours.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there in our solitary moments, there when we share in faith community.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there as we stay in familiar territory, there as we venture and risk.

Your love never leaves us! Amen.

HYMN 590 What a friend we have in Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLb96KDkJys>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Generous God,

you provide for the needs of the world,

providing food and shelter and justice.

You do not discriminate but seek the best for all –

especially the poor and disadvantaged people.

We praise you for your goodness and grace

that accompanies us every day of our lives

and we are overwhelmed by the hospitality you offer.

Thank you for your welcome at the banquet table of life.

May all glory and adoration be given to you,

loving God, giver of abundant life.

Loving God,

who calls us to dwell in your being,

we are confronted by how great are our shortcomings

and how easily we take for granted all you have given us.

We think that worship is optional

and that gathering together is, too often,

an inconvenience in the business of our daily schedule.

We think that we can serve you and know you anywhere

and forget that we are the body of Christ,

that when we gather the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit are realised.

Forgive us, that too often you
become an optional extra in our lives
rather than the most important reality we can know.

Help us to come to your banquet table
with humble and grateful hearts,
to know you and dwell with you.

This we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Here is the truth:

because of God's saving grace
we are forgiven and granted abundant life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

READINGS

- **Philippians 4:1-9**

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think

about[f] these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

- **Matthew 22:1-14**

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

HYMN 576 O for a closer walk with God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsLtziDXOgk>

SERMON

This parable about the wedding feast seems to me to be a bit over the top in some places. I am reminded of some of the scenes in movies like *The Blues Brothers* where the dramatic violence is overly exaggerated and almost stylized to the point that it doesn't seem all that horrific. The same could also be said of some scenes in other films, like *Pulp Fiction*. In the middle of this parable we also have what could be described as stylized violence. These story telling devices try to get our attention with overly dramatic scenes overplaying the point.

For me the stylized violence in the parable is produced to draw even more emphasis on to the massive act of grace from the king.

Jesus tells us that this story is about the Kingdom of God. I doubt that the actual scenes described are meant to be a realistic portrayal of life with God but this is in fact a story to clearly point out some aspects of God and how God views us.

We just have to think about other times that Jesus refers to the Kingdom, like with the woman kneading yeast, or the mustard seed, or the steward who embezzled the money from his master. All these images come together to give us a growing outline of the Kingdom of God.

This parable uses images which would have resonated with the Jewish audience for whom Matthew's Gospel was written. Like all good story tellers Jesus is using poetic license and drama to draw people's attention to the main points which he wanted to share with his audience.

So let's look at this parable in comparison to other stories. A king is preparing to celebrate his son's wedding with a big wedding.

I think that we should see that once again Jesus is talking about a party. Parties crop up in many places in the Gospels. At the start of John's Gospel we have Jesus attending a wedding with his mother where He whips up a good drop of wine. Then there are stories of parties at Matthew's house, Simon's house, then with Mary and Martha, and of course there is that massive celebration with Zacchaeus!

Then there are the party parables such as the generous welcome for the Prodigal Son. Also the widow's mite.

This celebration theme culminates in the very significant event we call the Last Supper. Jesus did a lot of his ministry centred on eating. In fact in Luke's Gospel all of His significant proclamations are around the meal table. This suggests to me that the Kingdom of Heaven might be a bit like an ongoing party.

Here we have the king letting everyone on his guest list know that they are going to be invited to the celebration. He wants to share his son's happiness with his peer group. As the time for the feast came near he sent his emissaries out a second time to confirm the date.

This is where the story starts to get serious. We are not told the full reasons behind the guests choosing not to attend. They were just a series of pretty lame excuses. The guests seemed more interested in routine daily activities instead of joining in the nuptial celebrations. This reminds me of how so many people become so ingrained with the routine of their lives that they

almost have a picture of a God who would devour them rather than feed and nourish them with fun and grace.

When we keep going into this parable we see that the king, after some reflection, sends out more emissaries to confirm that the party was now ready to start. This repetition is a story telling tool which helps to emphasize the point being made. The repetition three times is echoed throughout the Old Testament where God call to his prophets comes in lots of three requests.

The third time the messengers are not just ignored but some are accosted and others are even killed. This is where we see the over dramatization that I mentioned earlier. It is more than just a polite way of putting off the invitation it is openly offensive and unbelievable behaviour towards the king. It also echoes all the ancient prophets killed by their people.

Now, to put it lightly, the king is angry. Here is the dramatic emphasis. The king sends his soldiers to kill the murderers and burn down their cities. Of course this is a bit of overkill! I don't expect that we are expected to take this at face value. The exaggeration is for dramatic purpose, to emphasise the story at this point. A pointed shot at the so called 'chosen nation of Jews' who were Matthew's main audience.

The people that everyone expected to be the first ones on the guest list are now wiped from any list. These were the people who had all the privileges and all the opportunities and should have been honoured to have been present.

However they lacked one necessary attribute. They were too self-absorbed and distracted to be the slightest bit interested in the honour of being invited to the wedding celebration. These people ended up joining the ever growing list of people who Jesus was showing up as the ones who missed the vital connection offered by God. They chose to ignore what was offered freely to them.

We can reflect on the Pharisees in the Temple in Jerusalem so absorbed in his prayer about being better than anyone else around him that he almost ignores God. There is the older brother sulking outside the house as the whole community celebrated the amazing return of the prodigal son. There are the uptight 'do-gooders' who blew up over the local prostitute who let her hair down and generously splashed expensive perfume all over the Lord's feet. Then there were the so called normal people who blew up over Jesus eating with a tax collector.

So often people like to think that their good deeds and clean living are enough to allow them free entry into the king's house whenever they can be bothered and there was no need to respond when they are specifically invited. They don't think that the king might be offended when they don't show up. Why..., he wouldn't even miss us among all the other people! or would he??

The drama of the response in this parable is there to draw out for us the points that Jesus want to stay in our minds. There is no doubt that Jesus wants us to take to heart the consequences of ignoring the invitation. We are invited to the party and the consequences of ignoring the invitation is a matter of life and death literally.

It is in the death and resurrection of Christ that we receive this invitation. Since everything arises out of the free will gift from God we are invited to respond to that gift without any cost to us.

In the parable God quickly moves to Plan B. Despite the ignorant rebuttal by the 'A Listers' God now opens up the party list to everyone. His emissaries now share the open invitation with the instructions to invite everyone that they could find. This includes both the good and the bad. No-one is excluded!

Street people, addicts, young people with attitude, trades people, professionals and those who have lived on the wrong side of society, all are invited equally. The wedding venue was packed with these guests.

But there is one more stage in this parable. There is the person who was not wearing the correct clothes. This is not about some sort of fashion failure. This is about intention not what was worn.

The person singled out was brought to the king's attention by his attitude not his attire. He came without wishing to celebrate. He did not want to engage in the celebration he wanted to stay stuck in the distractions outside the wedding rather than joining in with the everlasting welcome and celebration.. Even with the second chance this person cannot recognize the graceful love simply for what it is and join in the celebration.

Which guest are we?

HYMN 533 I come with joy to meet my Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVGjrMgiH5U>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Gracious God,
may these gifts and the dedication of our lives
be a source of joy and goodness. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God,
whose goodness last forever and never fails,
we turn to you with our prayers and concerns.
We bring before you all who feel excluded from community.

Silent prayer

We pray for all who suffer because they are refused the means of life.

Silent prayer

We pray for all who seek healing and hope for the future.

Silent prayer

We pray for peace in every land
and for leaders who embrace your values of justice.

Silent prayer

We pray that your church will ever be a beacon of gospel truth.

Silent prayer

And we pray for one another, that we may be utterly faithful
disciples of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

Silent prayer

Loving God, hear the prayers of your people

spoken and written upon our hearts this day,
for we bring them in the name of Christ.

Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfHSk>

BENEDICTION

The message is clear:

go into the world and invite all to the banquet table.

Proclaim the good news of God's unfailing love
and generosity to all people.

Let us share in the feast of life
for the benefit of all.

And may God's love be in our hearts;
may Christ's good news be upon our lips;
and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit
enable us to live justly and enable us to do Your works on earth. Amen.