



"The wedding feast: joy and judgement"

A service sheet to guide reflections on and around Sunday
11th October 2020

Introduction We continue our study of Matthew's gospel with the parable of the wedding feast.

Gathering prayer

Lord God, faithful and loving, we do not always feel like rejoicing, even as we gather to worship you, for our minds are sometimes distracted and elsewhere; weighed down by the burdens of our lives.

Help us, in this moment, to find it within our hearts to rejoice in your constancy and abundance of care for us.

People of God, let us rejoice.

Hymn O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder (*Singing the Faith 82*)

1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome
wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath
made.
I see the stars, I hear the mighty
thunder,
thy power throughout the universe
displayed :

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to
thee :*

*How great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to
thee :*

how great thou art, how great thou art!

2 When through the woods and forest
glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the
trees .

When I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle
breeze :

3 And when I think that God, his Son not
sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can
take it in.
That on the cross, my burden gladly
bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin :

4 When Christ shall come with shout of
acclamation
and take me home — what joy shall fill
my heart ;
Then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim : my God, how great
thou art :

Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)

Prayer

God of hope and love, we never know what the future holds or where life will take us next. We never know what is just around the corner and what the outcomes of things will be. But we know that whatever follows from this moment, you are here with us, by our side, above and beneath us, entwining your life with ours, surpassing all understanding. In this moment, bless us and awaken us to your abiding presence. Amen.

For your hope when all seems hopeless: **We give you thanks and praise**

For the invitation to your Kingdom: **We give you thanks and praise**

For your gracious acceptance of our fears and doubts: **We give you thanks and praise**

For your love beyond measure: **We give you thanks and praise. Amen**

Bible Reading: Matthew 22 v 1-14

22 Jesus again used parables in talking to the people. ²"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. ³He sent his servants to tell the invited guests to come to the feast, but they did not want to come. ⁴So he sent other servants with this message for the guests: 'My feast is ready now; my steers and prize calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!' ⁵But the invited

guests paid no attention and went about their business: one went to his farm, another to his store, ⁶ while others grabbed the servants, beat them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was very angry; so he sent his soldiers, who killed those murderers and burned down their city. ⁸ Then he called his servants and said to them, 'My wedding feast is ready, but the people I invited did not deserve it. ⁹ Now go to the main streets and invite to the feast as many people as you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, good and bad alike; and the wedding hall was filled with people.

¹¹ "The king went in to look at the guests and saw a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' the king asked him. But the man said nothing. ¹³ Then the king told the servants, 'Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him outside in the dark. There he will cry and gnash his teeth.'"

¹⁴ And Jesus concluded, "Many are invited, but few are chosen."

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Reflection Joy and judgement

At a wedding some time ago, the minister took the message of 'Blessings' for his address. Afterwards, he laid the wedding rings on the open Bible he was holding, to bless them. Suddenly he sneezed. In unison, the congregation responded in good nature with 'Bless you!' followed by a gasp of "Oh" as they realised the Bible shook and the rings had fallen. In this case all was well - more than well. The unexpected happening seemed to bring the congregation together. There was a connection, a sense of blessedness, with the people warming to the minister who was perhaps seen as human after all! It was such a small incident, yet it brought a shift. More than breaking the ice, it was a change in attitude and atmosphere. I'd call it a moment of joy, or a Kingdom moment. That spirit of joy was not present with the invited guests in this morning's story.

The tradition then was to announce the coming wedding celebration to the guests but not give a date. That would be left open until preparations were complete. Can you imagine that today? When the fatted calves had been killed, and all else was ready, the servants would call the invited guests. "Come. The feast is prepared."

Who would have imagined the guests would turn down an invitation from the king? The first guests did so with a casual indifference. The next servants to go out emphasised that prize calves were all prepared. But these guests made excuses – work to do, a farm to attend to. There's always something to distract from the call of the Kingdom. Our 'to do list' can be endless as well. A few of the guests took real offence and resorted to terrible violence, which escalated with the king's fury to further violence.

Here are two parables in one, both holding violence and judgement where we might expect simply joy. Parables are frequently written with exaggeration, with issues in stark black and white to stress the points. This one follows that pattern. It is only with interpretation the stories make sense for those times and for today.

The guests here represent the people of Israel who considered themselves the chosen people of God. The servants are God's messengers. But when Jesus came and called the Jews to follow him, they rejected him and his teaching. A second refusal came when Jesus welcomed both Jews and Gentiles to the Kingdom. The message was good news for all, but it wasn't seen that way.

In this story, the invited guests didn't join the wedding feast, not only on account of the king's judgement, but because the people had excluded themselves from his generosity.

And then the doors were opened wide – the invitation was to all. They came from the streets - the good, the bad, the poor, and the wealthy. What an unexpected delight!

Where are we today in this story, in the context of the pandemic, and the context of our corporate and individual lives of pleasures and pain?

Do we still hear his call?

Can we see it as a call to the Kingdom feast in spite of the challenges?

Do we see Him perhaps in our struggling planet, the same planet he has so generously provided for us?

Do we see Him in a flimsy boat crossing the perilous waters of the Mediterranean, even though He has provided enough for all?

Will we be judged as much by what we've failed to do, than by the mistakes we've made?

The doors opened with joy! But the story doesn't quite end there. On arrival at the feast, one man is in the wrong clothes! There is joy - and judgement.

We might feel some compassion for this man, who at such short notice failed to observe the dress code. Most of us will have experienced a sense of embarrassment at some point when we've arrived at an event suddenly feeling overdressed, or underdressed! But the message here was much deeper than clothes. It was what they represented. He didn't have the clean clothes to signify a righteous spirit, and a sense of worthiness. It teaches us there's more to following Christ than saying 'Yes'. We are to live out our faith by following, mirroring Him through our attitudes, and our relationship with God and one another. Many are invited, but few are chosen.

And just a final word of instruction on our clothing (Colossians 3 v 12-14 from "The Message"): "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God has picked out for you - compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And, regardless of whatever else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all purpose garment. Never be without it." Amen.

Hymn Hear the Call of the Kingdom (*Singing the Faith* 407)

1 Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King ;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

2 Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through
us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.*

3 Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come :
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

*Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and
Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

Prayers for others and ourselves

Response: Lord hear us - **Lord, graciously hear us.**

God our healer,
we pray for those who suffer in mind or
body or soul; for the sick at home,
in hospital or in care homes.

We pray especially for those known to
us.....

We pray for those affected by the corona
virus, and those in fear of it.

We pray for those who look after them to
heal and to alleviate suffering

For medical and nursing staff in hospital
and in the community;

for carers and family in their homes.

We thank you for their care and

compassion, for their patience and grace

Lord hear us - **Lord, graciously hear us.**

God our consoler,
we pray for those who are sorrowful;
for the bereaved, the lonely, those
separated from loved ones, and any who
feel anxious and overwhelmed by loss and
sadness.
We pray they may be lifted and comforted,
and that we will be your messengers:
Lord, hear us - **Lord, graciously hear us.**

God our refuge and strength, an ever-
present help in trouble, today we are
troubled, because of the pandemic and its
consequences; because of the ways we
have created a fragile planet; because of
war and aggression, and where, daily,
refugees are fleeing in fear and
desperation.
We pray for those whose lives have been
darkened by circumstances.

Lord's prayer

Hymn Seek ye first the kingdom of God (*Singing the Faith* 254)

- 1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto
you ;
Allelu-, alleluia :
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia !
- 2 Ask, and it shall be given unto you ;
seek and ye shall find ;

God, an ever present help, fill your people
with Hope.
Fill us, your servants, with a determination
to help create change where it is needed,
and to be your hands and feet in the world.
Lord hear us - **Lord, graciously hear us.**

God our joy and judge, we pray for
ourselves here today, hearing of the joy
and judgement of being a disciple;
hearing of your abundance of love and
acceptance as we aim for follow you.
Clothe us now with the generosity of your
Spirit that we might be bold to serve,
and to share your loving grace with those
we meet.
Through Christ, our Lord and Redeemer.
Amen.

- knock, and the door shall be opened
unto you ;
Allelu-, alleluia :
- 3 We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the
Lord ;
Allelu-, alleluia :

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
wherever He may send you.
May He guide you through the wilderness;
protect you through the storm.
May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders he has shown you.
May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.
In the name of the Father and of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; the Love of God And the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and for evermore. Amen.