

Christ Church, 15 Oct. 2023

**Call to Worship** (based on Isaiah 25:1,4)

O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name.  
In perfect faithfulness you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.  
You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress.  
You are a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.  
O Lord, you are our God.  
We will exalt you and praise your name forever.

**Hymn** This is the day R&S 377

This is the day, this is the day  
That the Lord hath made, that the Lord hath made.  
We will rejoice, we will rejoice  
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.  
This is the day that the Lord hath made,  
We will rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made.

This is the day, this is the day  
When He rose again, when He rose again...

This is the day, this is the day  
When the Spirit came, when the Spirit came...

Les Garrett

**Introduction/Children's Time –**

**Offering**

May the offerings brought this day be used as seeds,  
planted faithfully and nurtured lovingly  
so that God's way may be realized anew in this world.  
Holy God, multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit  
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

**Hymn** The Lord's my Shepherd (Stuart Townsend) Red Folder 90

**Children leave for Sunday Club**

**Opening Prayer** (inspired by Matt 22:1-14)

Gracious God, in love You open wide the doors  
and welcome us into Your presence - saints and sinners alike.  
You spread a table before us, filled with the richest fare -  
a feast of love and mercy for the body and soul.  
We come with joy to meet You here, to eat and drink at Your table,  
to taste and see Your goodness, to celebrate Your grace and mercy in our lives.  
Generous God, we thank you for your invitation to gather round your holy table.  
When we look at the bread and the wine  
we are reminded of the body and blood of your Son:  
whose body that was broken for us and whose blood was shed.  
We are glad that you invite us to share in a special banquet  
of the richest food and the finest wine - a celebration banquet that reveals your heavenly Kingdom.  
Help us to respond to your invitation and not to despise it.  
Help us to put away our old clothes of sin and wear the wedding clothes of your Kingdom.  
Today we ask for your forgiveness for living without your presence in our lives:  
for relying on our own achievements;  
for believing that we are the architects of our own destiny;  
for living as though you have no place in our modern world.

Christ Church, 15 Oct. 2023

Forgive us, restore us, renew us and equip us to do Your will on earth,  
until the dawning of your heavenly Kingdom.  
Help us to find the riches of your grace, as we study your word, and meet with you in prayer.  
May Your Spirit inspire our praise and thanksgiving,  
as we worship together in Your presence.  
In the name of Jesus Christ, our host and Lord, **Amen.**

**Hymn** The Lord's my Shephard (*Crimond*) R&S 679

**Readings:** **Isaiah 25:1-9**  
**Matthew 22:1-14**

Today is the start of Challenge Poverty Week. This is a recognised organisation in its own right that the URC supports through the Joint Public Issues Team. Challenge Poverty Week provides an “opportunity for us all to say what needs to change to enable our communities to thrive. It’s a chance for voices that are too often ignored to be heard loud and clear. It’s a chance to show that it is possible to build a better, more compassionate society in which everyone can live life to the full.” If you’d like to learn more, just do an internet search. At first glance, it might seem that today’s parable of the wedding feast is a good reading to address issues of poverty. A king holds a feast, a party for his son’s wedding but the invited guests don’t want to go. We might assume that the guests are rich if they are invited to a king’s party. Then the king tells his servants to go out into the streets and invite ‘everyone’ to the party. We might assume that means everyone regardless of status or wealth and that it would probably include a lot of poor people, which in the times of Jesus, it would have. Unfortunately, the story is not quite that simple – though I think we should hold on to the ‘everyone’ both good and bad, was invited bit.

I was intrigued to discover when I did an internet search for commentary on this passage that it is part of the Religious Studies GCSE module about the Kingdom of God with an explanation on the BBC. It claims that the parable is about ‘universalism’ – that is, that the Kingdom of God is open to everyone, not only Jews. The wedding feast is a familiar setting – we heard the story not long ago of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding party, but this story has some surprising and extreme elements.

A king was preparing a wedding feast for his son. He sent his servants out to bring the invited guests – but they did not want to come. The servants were once again sent out with the message, “Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.”

Some guests ignored the servants and went instead to their farms or businesses. Others seized the servants, mistreated them and then killed them, which seems a very extreme way to turn down a party invitation. The king was furious and sent troops to destroy the

murderers and burn their city (we might see parallels there with the current situation in Israel/Palestine). He then instructed his servants to invite anyone they found, so that both good and bad people filled the hall at the wedding feast. In this BBC summary, the original guests invited were the Jews. The Jews believed that because they were God's chosen people that was all that was required to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (i.e. to be invited to the wedding feast). The Jews who ignored the servants were those who ignored the prophets who came to deliver the message of God, and perhaps those who refused to believe in Jesus. The Jews who reacted violently could be a reference to those who mistreated and murdered the prophets and messengers of God, and perhaps foretold of the rejection of Jesus. The guests who were invited afterwards are the Gentiles. This parable shows that the Kingdom of God is open to everyone, not just the Jews. Again, this fairly simple message is not all there is to this parable. Though again, we should hold onto the message that the Kingdom of God is open to everyone.

At the end of the parable, we see an interaction between the king and a man who was not dressed appropriately. He ordered the servants to bind this man and to throw him into the darkness where he will cry and gnash his teeth. Again, this seems like overkill – a dramatical over reaction to someone not wearing the right clothes. The BBC GCSE interpretation is that 'the unsuitably dressed man represents those who were not prepared for complete commitment to Jesus.' Even if that were the case, would we want to believe in and praise a God who reacted so violently to a lack of commitment?

Last week, the lectionary gave us the parable of the Wicked Tenants, which has sometimes been used as an expression of the Jewish faith being replaced by Christianity, with the original 'bad' tenants representing the Jews who are replaced by other tenants after they have killed the landowner's son, in other words after the Jews have killed Jesus. That interpretation bears similarities with today's parable in which the original invited guests are seen to be the Jews, and after they choose not to go to the wedding, the king invites everyone else, presumably Gentiles. In fact, the main point of the parable of the Wicked Tenants is that we have to not only say we believe but prove it by doing the work – by producing the fruits of God's kingdom which are justice and equity for all.

Last week the Kingdom of God was compared to a landowner, today it is compared to a king holding a wedding feast. I hope we all know that parables should not be interpreted literally, they are fictional stories using images people would understand, to make a particular point. While the allegory, that is a story that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one, may be seen in a parable, it should not control its meaning because the parable employs subversive language that reverses traditional

thinking. For example, while the king is like God in some sense, he is not the same as God. Likewise, his son is not Jesus. His servants who went out to call the invited guests are not prophets, and the invited guests are not Israel or the Jews. The king's violent response is not the same as the destruction of Jerusalem, spoken of by many of the prophets.

Allegorical interpretation is not wrong, but it has limitations because it tones down the deeper, more radical, urgent message of the kingdom of God in everyday life.

The allegorical interpretation cannot explain all the complexities in the parable of the wedding banquet. For example, why did the king not invite everyone on the main streets, both good and bad, to his party from the beginning? How could the invited guests reject the king's invitation? In the context of the times of Jesus, no one would refuse to do what the king or leader asked. Such rejection would have been social death in a traditional society like that. And how can we explain the king's extreme violence against the refusing guests and harsh treatment of a guest who did not wear a wedding robe? It hardly makes sense if the king is supposed to be God, even if you are thinking of a wrathful God of the Old Testament.

What can we learn from this parable where the kingdom of God is compared to a such a king? What is the radical, subversive message of this parable? One possibility is to focus on the literary context of this parable where Jesus challenges the uncaring work of the chief priests and the elders. In other words, this parable is a continuation of the earlier two parables in Matthew 21, that of the Two Sons and the Wicked Tenants because nothing is more important than doing the will of God. Even though the wedding guests were invited by God to do God's work, they neglected it, making themselves busy with their own businesses. But God does not give up on the work of saving people and calls others for that task. The subversive message is that the position and authority of religious leaders and the elites of society will not last forever because God will open a new door, break traditions into pieces, and continue the work of God's kingdom through other people. Those who respond to God's invitation and do God's work are worthy of God's kingdom – of participation in the wedding feast.

In Matthew's context, this parable challenges the members of the community to do the work of God because they were called and invited by God. If they do not do the work, they will lose their seat at the ultimate banquet. As God's servants, they should not discriminate against anyone; rather, they must invite everyone from the beginning, both the good and bad. Those who are called, who are invited must prove their identity by doing the work of God, not turning down the invitation. The status of a person is not a guarantee to please God or to serve people. The wedding robe as a metaphor may allude to the proving that we

are followers of Christ through our actions, otherwise, the harsh treatment of the guest who did not wear a wedding robe would be out of context. For Matthew, final judgment is always inevitable, but Matthew does not mean to scare members of the community. Rather, to encourage them to do God's will - because God is loving and perfect and welcomes everyone, they should do the same. The parable ends with the slightly mysterious phrase, "For many are called, but few are chosen." Called is an invitation and chosen means God's approval of that call. If we do not respond to God's call by doing the will of God, such an invitation is futile and not realized in our lives. So, at the end, what can we take from this parable – the kingdom of God is for all, everyone is invited, and we need to not simply pay lip-service to our faith, but live it out by actions that ensure all are welcome and all are fed, and that's not a bad commitment to make as Challenge Poverty Week starts when many people across the country will be doing what they can to try to eliminate poverty.

**Hymn** The feast was spread for all to see (Tune *On Christmas night* at R&S 153)

The feast was spread for all to see,  
the host then summoned company;  
successful, rich and satisfied,  
they made excuses – even lied.  
Lives filled with self, lives packed with pride –  
lives too full to let God inside!

The host then sent to scour each street  
for those whom 'nice' folk never meet.  
He welcomed poor and blind and lame;  
those crushed, forgotten, trapped by shame.  
Lives filled with hurt, lives raw and sore,  
lives our God could make whole once more!

The summons spread across the land,  
'til all the hungry were at hand;  
the door then closed to leave outside

those rich, complacent, satisfied.  
Feast for the crushed, feast righting wrong,  
feast that shouts God's great justice song!

This feast's now spread for you and me,  
if we'll accept God's company.  
Christ summons us from near and far,  
no matter who or where we are;  
laid down his life, paid ev'ry cost,  
wine and bread to revive the lost!

So let us come and share what's giv'n,  
this foretaste of the feast of heav'n;  
respond, receive, and be made new  
for all the things we're called to do.  
Receive God's gift, that we may all  
live our lives to announce God's call

John Campbell © 2016 Kevin Mayher Ltd

### **Lord's Supper**

No special qualifications are needed;  
No particular connections or exclusive memberships required;  
No secret passwords or unique attributes expected;  
No campaigning or canvassing, no examinations or reference checks;  
Just an amazing invitation to a feast; to find our place at Your table,  
alongside these other unworthy ones, these other beloved ones;  
these others humble enough to accept the invitation without asking who else will be there.

Jesus, Lord of the Feast, with thankful and open hearts,  
we accept Your amazing invitation to this special meal.  
The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations,

and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us, to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord**

**God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

Lord God, send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine, and upon your people, that Christ may be with us, and we may be ready to live for you and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Sharing of bread and wine**

**Prayer after communion**

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.

You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.

Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom, and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Prayers of Intercession**

God, we come into Your presence with praise and thanksgiving for Your faithful love.

Your love never fails; not even we turn away from You:

when we ignore Your invitation, or desert You for gods of our own making.

Even then You do not abandon us, but reach out again and again inviting us back into relationship once more.

Christ Church, 5 Sept. 2021 Written service circulated to both churches

As You welcome us, so You welcome our prayers.

We bring them to You with confidence, knowing that You will hear and answer.

Merciful God, at the start of Challenge Poverty Week we pray for all those living in poverty and the many organisations and individuals who work hard to make poverty a thing of the past. As you have been generous to us, help us to try our good fortune, so that all may have enough for their needs. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray with all those living with any kind of disability or impairment. Make us mindful that often the difficulties of being disabled are caused by prejudice and misunderstanding of the able-bodied. Help us to be more caring and understanding. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray for all those with mental health issues and those who care for them. And we pray for those living with learning difficulties or autism, that they may find understanding and support.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray for unity and equality and an end to discrimination and prejudice of all kind. We pray for those who have experienced discrimination because of their disability, mental health, or stigma because they live with dementia; for those who experience prejudice because of their sexuality or the colour of their skin, or because they are poor, or uneducated. Help us to truly remember that in Christ we are all one, created in God's image. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, we pray today for all those who go hungry and for the people who help them, through volunteering at foodbanks, by donating food and money, or by speaking out and raising awareness of issues.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those around the world affected by climate change in recent heatwaves, floods and storms; and for all those affected by the recent earthquake in Afghanistan.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

In this month of October, we make donations for Commitment for Life. Bless the work of this organisation. We pray especially for the area we particularly support – Israel/Palestine. For an end to war and death. We pray that both sides may come together to talk and find a solution to the longstanding issues in this area – the birth place of all Abrahamic faiths.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those in hospital, those awaiting test results or treatment, for the dying and those who mourn.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Holy God, we gather all our prayers together in the prayer your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ taught us, saying: **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Let us build a house Red Folder 54 omit v3

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:  
*all are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Christ Church, 5 Sept. 2021 Written service circulated to both churches

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:  
*all are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger:  
*all are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace, I  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
*all are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Marty Haugen

### **Blessing**

Go forth, strengthened to do the work of Christ, standing in the gap,  
extending the invitation to the eternal banquet, rejoicing in God.  
And may the God who created you, the Christ who redeems you  
and the Spirit who empowers you, be with you today and ever more. Amen

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352  
One License A-738739