

## 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020 – Pentecost +19 – Chris’s Sermon

Matthew 22: 1-14

In our gospel, Jesus is (again) confronted by the chief priests and the pharisees. Following on from the parable of the two sons called to work in the vineyard (which we heard 2 weeks ago) and the parable of the wicked tenants (which we heard last week), today Jesus offers up the parable of the wedding banquet. All of these parables talk about the call to be faithful – the call to share in the blessings of the kingdom. And, of course, the parables remind us that we must choose our response with care – we must consider how we will respond to God’s call (God’s invitation). And this is the point of the reading – some reject the blessings that are offered at the wedding banquet (or in the vineyard) and some of the people accept these blessings – and share these blessings.

Again, when I imagine the chief priests and pharisees listening to the words of Jesus – I can picture in my mind their anger - growing and growing. Through the parables of the vineyard and the wedding banquet, Jesus challenges the chief priests and the pharisees – he calls them to think about their willingness to receive and share the blessings of God. (So, he’s questioning their authority. But, more importantly, he’s questioning their behaviour – and their faithfulness.)

In our second reading from Philippians, Paul gives us a wonderful description of this grace at work. In Paul’s letter, we see what it looks like when we accept the invitation – when we accept God’s blessing – when we accept the invitation to share in the beauty and riches of the wedding banquet (or the fruits of the harvest).

In the words of Paul, “...whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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 these things... and the God of peace will be with you...”

Paul reminds us that our willingness to share in the blessings of the wedding banquet extend beyond outward appearance – beyond the self-serving piety of the chief priests. Jesus and Paul remind us that faith is a deeply personal matter – and it will be evident in our lives (in our choices) – in our attitudes and our actions. Our readings talk about a grace that is overflowing – a grace that we share with those around us – when we give ourselves in service. Of course, we talked about this last Sunday when we gave thanks for the life and ministry of St Francis. Francis is a man who lived this faith. The prayer of St Francis is really good example of this grace at work, visible for all to see:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And, where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This prayer talks about the wedding banquet – it talks about the fruits of the harvest (peace, love, forgiveness, faith, hope, joy – it sounds wonderful). And, we see this faith written on the hearts of the saints of God’s church – known and unknown – those who give themselves in service to the kingdom.

And, this is the point of the parable. Jesus calls the chief priests and the Pharisees to rediscover their calling – to eat - and to be full - and to give - and to share. And, Paul encourages the faithful at Philippi to experience this transformation in their community. (Evidently, they needed some encouragement.) “...let our gentleness be known by everyone...” (these are Paul’s words).

He assures the people that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard their hearts and minds in Christ...” In other words, like Jesus, Paul reminds the people of Philippi that the peace of God the source of all understanding and gentleness can still be theirs – even in times of difficulty – even in times of grief and loss – even in times of confusion and doubt. This is the heavenly banquet that Jesus describes in our reading.

Our readings (I think) talk about unconditional hope and encouragement and acceptance – a grace that stands in contrast to the conventional wisdom that we often see in the world around us – a worldly wisdom that can be very conditional – a wisdom that separates and divides.

But, in the parable of the wedding banquet, there are no favourites – there are no conditions or exclusions (no distinction between the worthy and the unworthy). After the chosen guests make their choice – after they turn away, the invitation is then offered to everyone in the street – to everyone who could be found (both the good and the bad).

And, I think this may have been the most significant difference between the teachings of Jesus and the traditional beliefs of the chief priests. The kingdom of God that’s described by Jesus (and Paul) points to a God of abundant blessings – a God of infinite love and overflowing grace.

But, as always, the blessings are given to us in proportion to our willingness to receive them. (The choice always rests with the people who receive the invitation.) In the words of our collect, we pray that God will grant us the grace to be continually thankful for all that has been given to us – and we pray that in that thankfulness we will be eager to serve and live for others. As we respond to the call to share in God’s blessings, may this prayer find a home within us.

The Lord be with you