



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

18th Sunday after Trinity ~ October 11th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also thinking about how other aspects of church life and people's needs can be met.
Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am

St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am

Please Note:

Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.

Prayers for this Week

God of goodness and kindness, you invite all peoples to the banquet and offer them a feast beyond compare. Give us your saving grace to keep unstained the robe of our baptism until that day when you welcome us to heaven's joyful table. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Beyond our understanding you alone are God; you speak to a world of brutal rule and shallow indifference, of arms fairs and reality shows: may the one who came to sit at table with victimized and excluded disturb our barren peace and call us to another feast where only love may rule; through Jesus Christ, the bridegroom.

Amen.

Reading: Matthew 22 v1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to chief priests and Pharisee in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 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.” But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” 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.

‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. 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.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Meditation

I think if we wished to retell this parable today, as a cartoon would be the most appropriate way. For it is a story of exaggeration, caricature and even slap-stick. Although there are no princesses or unicorns, it reads like a fairy story, and like many of the traditional folk stories it invites you to meditate on and wrestle with its messages. Let’s highlight its characteristics.

This is not just any party! it is one thrown by a king! by the king for his son! who would refuse to come to such an important society event? People are dying to get a treasured invite to such a royal wedding; to be seen, to be nosey, to show off, to meet influential people, to party and to have fun. This is the party people want an invite for, yet in our fairy tale no-one who is invited accepts. But kings are kings, and they have another army of slaves who can be sent out after the first army of slaves have been rebuffed. These slaves not only repeat the invitation but announce the menu and describe the decorations and music. Yet again those invited rebuff the slaves and make excuses. Not serious reasons, they just make light of it. Has the king got such a terrible reputation that to be seen at the banquet would be so terrible?

As an aside in Luke’s version of the same parable, the reasons given are the reasons to avoid conscription in times of war, as if the banquet was a battleground or a place where life and limb would be put at risk.

Actually some of the reasons for refusing the invitation are meant to be very trivial, to the farm or to work, but the last fits in with my unreal fairy tale blockbuster movie retelling; the invited guests first seize the slave messengers, then maltreat them, and finally kill them! How realistic is that!

Thus the king’s response is equally out of order, out of scale and unrealistic; he is angry (fair enough), he sends his troops (why have an army if you are not going to use it!), murders the murdering guests (an eye for an eye?!?) and finally goes much beyond and fires their city. Not just the guests, but the whole way of life which presumably has lots of other innocent victims. Real life or what?!

Now our fairy tale cartoon king turns his back on the bloodshed and gets back to the party. Those originally invited are absent, and yet more slaves are sent out to invite anyone, literally anyone, to come the party, good or bad. The party starts with these unplanned guests, with the original invitees dead or scorned.

Now picture the king making his grand entrance. Wine, women and song; eating, drinking and making merry. A dense crowd of people. But in this crowd the king notices someone improperly dressed, and the king interrogates him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless.

Well, I’d be speechless too! After all, this improperly attired party-goer was not originally invited, he did not plan to go to the banquet, he was just minding his own business when the slaves invited, or even compelled him to come. Of course he was not properly dressed, perhaps we should be amazed if anyone at the party was! But we need not be surprised for we have already learnt that this king’s response can be angry, disproportionate and violent. Bind him! Throw him out! Maybe even throw him into dungeons or torture chambers; we are indeed in cartoon, caricature, fairy tale territory!

Again, an aside, Luke's version both has the slaves seeking people out in the town and in the distant countryside, and when there are still not enough to fill the party (or the king's ego) they compel (sic) people to come. And the people who arrive are welcomed despite being maimed, blind and lame. But Luke does not record anything about wedding garments, and all who arrive are welcomed. Luke's parable is much more realistic, with the message that God's banquet is especially for the outcast, and that many who expected to be there, in fact turn the invitation down.

But Matthew tells the story in a far-fetched way, to continue to confront and alarm us, and to make us surprised or even shocked, by the punchline. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Does this shock us? Which bit? The many or the few? Where do you see yourself?

Throughout the history of the Christian Church there have been some who have been convinced that there are a chosen few, and all too often they have meant "people like me". Perhaps we need to be shocked in our assumptions about calling, being chosen, be many or few. Perhaps we need to be shocked about invitations we may have received or rejected? Perhaps we need not to identify with guests, but with the king, and see that sometimes our behaviour is as irrational and egotistical as his?

But before you get too despairing, remember too that Jesus tells this parable to those who will shortly, when the time is safe for them to do so, arrest Jesus and drag him to the cross. It also follows last week's parable of the tenants in the vineyard, which may have asked us what sort of tenants ought we to aspire to be. Now this parable asks us what sort of guest, or host, are we to be. Invited or dragged in, prepared or not expecting the bridegroom to arrive.

But, one last detail; the challenged guest was speechless (perhaps understandably) but what would you have to say; either in the context of the far-fetched parable, or perhaps much more significantly, if we are asked by God, "How did you get here?" Do we have an answer?

Well today, I hope this might be the answer, I'd sing;

Just as I am - without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me,
and that Thou bidst me come to Thee,-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - though toss'd about with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - poor, wretched, blind; sight, riches, healing of the mind,
yea, all I need, in Thee to find, -O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - Thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because Thy promise I believe,-O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - Thy love unknown has broken every barrier down;
now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, -O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am - of that free love the breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
here for a season, then above, -O Lamb of God, I come!

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Let us pray for the preservation of the earth.

We give thanks for the beauty and abundance of the earth, give us and all peoples the grace to live in harmony with your creation, wisdom and generosity in our use of its resources.

Today begins the week of Prayer for World Peace; we pray for the power to be gentle; the strength to be forgiving; the patience to be understanding; and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding on to what we believe to be right. May we put our trust in the power of good to overcome evil and the power of love to overcome hatred. We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe in a world emancipated from violence, a new world where fear shall no longer lead men or women to commit injustice, nor selfishness make them bring suffering to others. Help us to devote our whole life and thought and energy to the task of making peace, praying always for inspiration and power to fulfil the destiny for which all people were created.

Let us pray for our nation.

We give thanks for this land and the diversity of its peoples. Grant that we may so honour one another that all may be enriched by our common heritage and freed from despair, poverty and exclusion. Help us to make and keep this country a home for all its different peoples, and grant our government and all its representatives imagination, skill and energy that there may grow amongst us peace and unity.

Let us pray for the Church and its mission.

We give thanks for the good news of salvation for all people. Strengthen us for our work in the world, empower your Church to proclaim the gospel of service, word and sacrament. Unite in the truth all who confess your name, that we may live together in love to your glory.

Let us pray for ourselves and our community.

We give thanks for the fellowship of the communities in which we live and work. We commend to your keeping ourselves and each other, our families, those with whom we work and learn, our neighbours and our friends. Enable us by your Spirit to live in love for you and one another.

Let us pray for those in need.

We give thanks that you are the God who brings mercy and wholeness. Comfort, we pray for those who are in sorrow, need, sickness, or any trouble. Give to those who care for them wisdom, patience and gentleness and, to us all, your peace.

Today is Homeless Sunday so we pray to God who loves all his children and is a home to those who are in need or trouble. Inspire your Church with the Spirit of Christ's Love. Empower us to battle the injustice of homelessness with compassion and to show each person in need your kindness. Protect us and protect people, especially the most vulnerable, from Covid. Give us your wisdom and your steadfast perseverance in this next season. And help us to live in the unity of the body of Christ.

Let us give thanks for the faithful departed.

We give you thanks for your servants in every age. Grant that we, with St Peter, St Mary, St John and St Wendreda and all your saints, may be brought to a joyful resurrection and the fulfilment of your kingdom.