

Transcript October 11th

Theme: The kingdom of heaven is like a banquet

Introduction and Welcome

Hello, and welcome to our service for Sunday 11th October.

My name is Nick Bird, and I'm the parish priest for a lovely group of parishes just to the east of the city of York.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not like an interminable queue.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not like a mountain that one needs to climb.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not like your worst family Christmas.

No, Jesus tells us that 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a banquet', and that is what we shall be exploring today.

The opening words of the scriptures say this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, who knows neither morning nor evening, yet wraps us in love both night and day.

Lift the curtain from the world and the veil from our hearts.

Rise with the morning sun upon our souls and enliven our work and prayer.

May we walk this day in the steps of your Son who lived on earth and who always worked in harmony with your will

Amen.

Song: The Lord's My Shepherd

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not
.want
He makes me lie in pastures
green.
He leads me by the still, still
waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone.
And I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.
I will trust, I will trust in you.
I will trust, I will trust in you.
Endless mercy follows me,
Goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in
righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.
Refrain

3 And though I walk the darkest
path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod
and staff
are the comfort I need to know.
Refrain

Confession

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray

and to give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things
which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Collect :

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings:

Isaiah 25.1-9

Praise to the Lord
Lord, you are my God;
I will exalt you and praise your name,
for in perfect faithfulness
you have done wonderful things,
things planned long ago.
You have made the city a heap of rubble,
the fortified town a ruin,
the foreigners' stronghold a city no more;
it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will honour you;
cities of ruthless nations will revere you.
You have been a refuge for the poor,
a refuge for the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the storm
and a shade from the heat.
For the breath of the ruthless
is like a storm driving against a wall
and like the heat of the desert.
You silence the uproar of foreigners;
as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine –
the best of meats and the finest of wines.
On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears
from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace
from all the earth.
The Lord has spoken.

In that day they will say,

'Surely this is our God;
we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the Lord, we trusted in him;
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'

Philippians 4.1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22.1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

'Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

'But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and 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 wedding clothes. He asked, "How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?" The man was speechless.

'Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

'For many are invited, but few are chosen.'

Homily: Judith Hewitt

The kingdom of heaven is like a banquet and everyone is welcome.

I am Judith Hewitt and I am a Reader in this group of Churches and I have been asked to share some thoughts on today's Gospel reading with you.

Whenever you have an important occasion to organise there is always the question of who do you ask and how are they to be seated. This is even more difficult at the moment as numbers for certain events are very restricted. Some have said that because numbers have to be limited you can then concentrate on the event and have a more intimate celebration.

In today's Gospel we have another image of the kingdom of heaven, one that I am sure many of us can imagine, a wedding feast.

All those who were listening to Jesus would begin to imagine themselves invited to such a royal wedding. But who are the invitations being sent to? Initially, they were being sent to the Jews, the leaders of the house of Israel, for God wanted them to be part of his kingdom.

The king would have announced the news of his son's wedding banquet, rather like we might have a 'save the date' card, so everyone would have been ready to receive the invitation. At this wedding the invitation would have been a command because it came from the king and it would have been an honour to be invited. It would appear that all of the

guests had accepted the first invitation, and so they would be expected to come. It was usual, then, to receive a second invitation, which would come when the banquet was almost ready.

The invitations are delivered for this magnificent wedding banquet, and the refusals to attend start to happen. It was as if they didn't want to know, they had deliberately forgotten. Some guests claimed they were now too busy to spare the time. Some were so angry at being reminded of their original acceptance that they actually killed the messengers. They failed to obey the king's command, they rejected his invitation, and rejection isn't a pleasant feeling.

But the king wasn't going to call the banquet off, he didn't accept their excuses. He wasn't going to cancel the banquet if the chosen wouldn't attend. He just sent his servants further afield to deliver more invitations. He just wanted people to accept his invitation.

The servants brought in all types of people. The wedding hall was full of guests for the celebration.

Jesus always had a reason behind his parables so why did he tell this one, and in the presence of the chief priests and Pharisees. They must have realised Jesus was talking about them, after all they were the invited ones. Not only did they refuse the invitation, but they turned on his servants and ill-treated them, in fact they were positively working against the kingdom.

Jesus told this story to show God's desire for people, for you and for me. The banquet here is God's kingdom. The prophets were the servants being sent out to invite the people to come to the banquet, but many refused to accept the invitation. It is God who is sending out invitations to the wedding banquet for his son.

In refusing the invitation they were in danger of ignoring the voice of God. The king cannot be ignored or disobeyed without a consequence. There will be a price to pay. The leaders of Israel had no excuse. God had sent Jesus to them and they had not responded to any of his teaching, in fact they had done the opposite and ignored him.

Jesus is reaching the end of his time here on earth and this parable occurs in the days before his betrayal and death. So now we have Jesus inviting people to come, with the invitation that is open for all to accept. No one is excluded from the invitation, for no one is beyond the reach of God. The good news of Jesus is

for all people. God will receive everyone who comes to him. But that invitation may not remain open to those people who at first refuse it.

We are generously invited into God's kingdom. How will we respond? Are we preoccupied with our business in this world or resentful of God's call upon our personal lives? Or are we ready to receive his open-hearted welcome?

This invitation from God is a free gift. It doesn't matter who we are and it doesn't depend on anything we have done.

And if we have joined the party to honour the Son, are we grateful guests? It can be easy to forget that we enter the kingdom through Christ's merits alone. We are also called, as

citizens of heaven, to continue to submit our whole lives to Jesus as Lord, day by day. We may enter the kingdom through grace, but we cannot demand to stay there on our own terms.

Accepting God's invitation will bring a transformation to our lives, we cannot stay the same. Life should now be lived in joy and hope, with love towards others. God doesn't say it will be easy but if we are obedient to his call he will encourage us now and in the future.

As I said earlier we are all welcome to God's amazing, brilliant, fantastic banquet, which is far superior to anything we can ever imagine. The good news is that we can begin to experience it right now and the church communities to which we belong to should help us.

For many it has been difficult not sharing in fellowship during this pandemic but we don't need to worship in a church building to be in the presence of God, for the church in itself cannot guarantee us a place in the kingdom after we die. For that, we need to follow Jesus in heart as well as mind and to learn to love unconditionally, just as Jesus loves us and that is something we can all do wherever we are.

Amen

Intercessions:

Lord we thank you for the abundance of your love and all that you gift to us. Your harvest spills into our homes. Our cupboards and fridges are full of good things from around the world and our meal tables are not short of quantity or choice. Each year the earth pours forth an amazing harvest and yet generous God we often fail to stop and give you thanks.

For what we have received make us truly thankful

We remember many people who have worked hard, sweated, hurt their backs and endured all weathers to get food to us – honest toil and sometimes exploited labour. Also there were packers, shippers, warehousemen, lorry drivers and shop assistants – all have passed on your good gifts to our tables and truly deserve our thanks.

For what we have received, make us truly thankful

Lord when we next take a tomato from the fridge, cut a slice of bread or pour some rice in a pan, bring to our minds in humble gratitude the chain of production that got food there. Help us to realise the complexity of our interdependence with the rest of the world, and let our hearts and minds pause to realise the abundance of your love.

For what we have received, make us truly thankful.

As we enjoy your bountiful gifts, we remember with sorrow and regret that our over consumption in the west is at the expense of others. Your good earth produces food for everyone but not for everyone's greed. Strengthen the hands of the aid agencies, re-order the priorities of governments and move the hearts of us all to recognise the face of Christ in the plight of the hungry.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

We have moved from the fullness of summer into the season of Autumn,

a time of gradual closing down. And yet there is a final exuberant burst of colour, swirling leaves, evening chill as nature settles down to sleep. The mood of autumn is reflective, pondering the turning of the years. So we too, sometimes have autumn in our hearts as we adjust to a gentler stage of life, perhaps facing advancing years or some debilitation or loss. However there is beauty in this time, as memory and experience combine to give wisdom, and a deeper grasp of what is important. But some people may be full of melancholy and sadness. So picture those people now whom you know, entering their autumn with gratitude, or with a sense of loss, and pray for them quietly in your hearts.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Lord's Prayer

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
Now and for ever,
Amen

Song: Sing of the Lord's goodness

1. Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us,
his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.

*Come, then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

2. Power he has wielded, honour is his
garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken,

one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.
Come, then, all you nations...

3. Courage in our darkness,
comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary,
pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Come, then, all you nations...

4. Praise him with your singing,
praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals,
praise him with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

Come, then, all you nation

Blessing

Thank you for joining us today for worship, and thank you to all those who contributed to today's service and brought it to us this morning.

Let us ask for God's blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you

Deep peace of the flowing air to you

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you

Deep peace of the shining stars to you

Deep peace of the Son of peace to you.

God's blessing be yours

And well may it befall you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit

Amen