

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 14TH FEBRUARY 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS; THE GREAT BANQUET (LUKE 14:15-24)

Welcome and Announcements

"Hello and welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 14th February 2021. I pray that it will be an encouragement to you as you read it today." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 50:1-6

*The Mighty One, God, the Lord,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to where it sets.
From Zion, perfect in beauty,
God shines forth.
Our God comes
and will not be silent;
a fire devours before him,
and around him a tempest rages.
He summons the heavens above,
and the earth, that he may judge his people:
'Gather to me this consecrated people,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.'
And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
for he is a God of justice.*

Opening Prayer

God of light and truth,
open our eyes to the glory of your presence
in the world around us,

but chiefly in the face
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord;
that we may grow into his likeness,
and attain the happy fulfilment of our hope
when the splendour of the Saviour
will be revealed;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen

Reading - Luke 14:15-24

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' 16 Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. 17 At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." 19 Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." 20 Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." 22 And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." 23 Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner."'

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Great Banquet'

Have you ever had that experience of feeling left out? It's awful, isn't it? Whether it's finding out that there was a party that you weren't invited to, or discovering that your family has made a decision without involving you, or it's when you don't have the marks, experience, skills, or money, to go somewhere, or be part of something. Whatever it is, that feeling of rejection can be really hurtful, and can leave us feeling pretty down about ourselves.

We are doing a sermon series on the parables of Jesus, and today's parable is about a party. In this story we see that there are some people who reject the invitation to this party, but that those who in life feel rejected themselves, are welcomed and accepted. This story shows us that the people who are a part of the kingdom of God are not always the type of people that you might expect. This parable is a warning for those that want to reject and exclude others because of their social standing in life, but it is a welcome to those that feel left out, and a reassurance that we are all wanted in God's kingdom. This parable comes from Luke 14, and in this chapter Jesus is having a meal at the house of a prominent pharisee. The pharisees were the community leaders, and they were very well respected at the time. The other guests at this meal would have been the religious elite, the 'who's who' of the Jewish synagogue scene. But it seems to be that Jesus's invitation to this meal had more to do with hostility rather than hospitality. It says in verse 1 that 'he was being carefully watched'. The pharisees did not like Jesus because his teaching and his way of life exposed their hypocrisy, and it challenged their status in life. Their focus was on exalting themselves and keeping other people humble. But Jesus says that if you have a position of privilege in life, then you should use it to help others, not use people to further your own privilege. At the meal he tells them, *"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."* (vv. 13-14)

After Jesus says that, somebody in verse 15 blurts out, *“Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”* Maybe they were trying to break the tension, or wanting to change the subject. Jesus replies with a parable and says, ‘yes, there will be a great many people that will eat at the eternal heavenly feast, but they are not going to be the people that you are expecting.’ Let us read from this story in Luke 14, starting at verse 16, *“A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he said to his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field and, I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I’ve just got married, so I can’t come.’”*

This time last year, Julie and I were busy sending out the invitations to our wedding. We had come up with the guest list, we had found everybody's address, we gotten all the stamps, and posted them out. We had finalised the menu, we had decided how we wanted the napkins to be folded, we had tasted the cake, and we were making our spreadsheet of those people that had rsvp'd. Everything was set. But by the time the meal came about, it was just me and Julie, in my sister-in-law's back garden, eating a meal that she had kindly cooked for us! A lot can change between sending invitations and eating the meal. Of course for us it was coronavirus, which completely changed all our plans, and we had to tell our guests, ‘don't come anymore!’

In this parable too a lot has changed between the sending of the invites and the eating of the meal. But in this parable it is the guests who no longer want to come, and they all start making excuses. But these excuses seem a little weak. Who spends a lot of money buying something without seeing it first? And there's nothing urgent, nothing that couldn't wait till tomorrow. You get the feeling that either the people are lying, and just making things up because they do not want to come anymore. Either that or they're incredibly

foolish, or else they are really self-absorbed. Things are not turning out as expected. In all these parables there is a deeper meaning beneath what is going on the surface, and in this story the man who is having the party represents God, and the banquet stands for that future heavenly feast when Christ returns. The guests that make excuses are those who reject Jesus, and refuse to accept his invitation to be part of the kingdom. And that is the shocking truth that we see happen in the gospels. The people that we would expect to be the first to follow Jesus – the religious leaders, the clergy, and the theologians – they are the ones that reject him, and even conspire to kill him.

The next unexpected thing that happens in the story is the host's response. *“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered her servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and to the country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’”* (vv.21-23) All these people that the invitation is extended to would have known what it was to feel left out. Either because of who they were, or what had been done to them, or bad decisions they had made, or simply because of their background. They would have all experienced some level of rejection from their society. In the parable they stand for those that accepted Jesus and his invitation, and in turn were accepted into God's eternal love.

The parable then finishes in verse 24 by the host saying, “I tell you not one of those who are invited will get a taste of my banquet.” Now we miss this in our modern English translations, but the ‘you’ in that sentence is plural. The master switches from talking directly to his servant to addressing all of his guests. He is welcoming them to the feast, and this is a picture of what Jesus describes in verse 11 that the humble are being exalted, while those are trying to exalt themselves have been humbled. But the change from a

singular 'you' into a plural 'you' is almost as if the host breaks the fourth wall, and now Jesus is speaking directly to those people at the table. This is a warning. They are expecting to eat in the kingdom of God, but they fail to realise that it's Jesus' banquet. If they continue to reject him and refuse to listen to his message, then they will have no part of that feast.

Maybe this 'you' is meant to get our attention too. Perhaps it's a warning to some of us, because a lot can happen between the invitation and the meal. Possibly some of us are giving Jesus excuses too, and we are prioritising the wrong things in life, putting the focus on money, career, or our relationships. But the warning is that if we keep on making excuses about why we don't accept Jesus invite to read the bible, or praying, or give, or serve, or obey. Then we may end up not be tasting in Jesus's eternal banquet.

This story is a warning to those who reject, but it is a welcome to those who accept. No matter who you, or what has been done to you. No matter what bad decisions you have made in the past, or what your background is, there is a place for you in Christ's kingdom. Today you are receiving an invitation with your name on it to sit with Jesus at his eternal banquet. Today Jesus is inviting you, he's saying, 'Come, come into my presence, receive my forgiveness, experience my eternal love, come, be filled with my hope.'

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you were rejected on the cross so that I could be included in your resurrection. God, I am sorry for the excuses I make for my pride and sin, and for my refusal to love others as you have loved me. Today, by repentance and through faith, I accept your invitation to receive forgiveness, and to feast with you in your heavenly banquet. Holy Spirit, I welcome you into my life today, fill me with the humility and love of Christ now and forever. Amen.