**Sunday 15th October**

**Proper 23 | Ordinary 28**

**The Revd Wayne Hawkins**

**Call to Worship**

Welcome to worship. No matter your name you have a place here;

every name equally valuable, every name holding the sacred.

No name is greater and no name is less important.

Every name is spoken and heard

and the one behind that name is loved and held dear.

Come let us worship God together.

**Prayer**

From the moment we awake to face the day ahead, You are with us,
through good times and bad, Your presence enough for our needs.

Through the hours of the day, in our travels, study and work, You are with us;

in decisions and choices we must make, Your wisdom enough for our needs.

At the end of the day when we lay down to rest, You are with us,

as we lay our fears at Your feet, Your peace enough for our needs.

God of all creation Your love present in the beginning of all things,
reaches throughout all history and touches our lives.
Your love sees failings and forgives.
Your love feels pain and wipes away our tears.
Your love knows grief and comforts the sorrowful.
When we fail to live lives that reflect Your love,
or we take for granted all that you have done for us,
when we trample over others in order to get our own way,

through your Spirit, transform and empower us to

live lives full of love, Amen

Reading

St Matthew 22:1-17

All-age/Children’s activities

Aim: to see that everyone is welcome at God’s table.

1. Create some invitations to a party

Talk about who we might invite?

Would we invite friends or perhaps someone famous? Talk about the reasons we would invite that person.

Would we invite only people who might invite us back the next time?

1. Make a party hat

Very basic cardboard party hats can be purchased at the supermarket which can then be adapted and made to look special with stickers, pom poms, streamers etc.

1. Prepare some party food to share

You could decorate bun cakes from the supermarket with icing, sprinkles etc. You might make enough to share with church over coffee and tea after the service.

Talk about Matthew 22:1-17 and the invitation to the king’s banquet, which it turns out is for everyone. The challenge in the parable is the ill-prepared invitee who is kicked out for not being dressed appropriately. Perhaps the most suitable explanation is that this feature (unique to Matthew) is that this is concerned with being ready and prepared to receive an invitation to the banquet.

Notes for a Sermon

Frequently weddings are seen as the setting for a joyful resolution when lovers overcome the many hurdles on their journey to the altar, or the final scene in an unfolding tragedy. The same in Scripture – in the Hebrew Scriptures Isaiah imagines a feast of fine wine and choicest food where God overcomes death and invites people from every nation to one table. And Jesus, when he imagines God’s reign will end history, it is a story of a king hosting a splendid wedding feast. The banquet is ready, everything is prepared and the king, perhaps somewhat self-contented, summons the guests to attend. Surprisingly, some simply ignore the invite and head out of town. Others beat the king’s messengers and so the king sends an army to wipe out the invited guests. And in their place, he invites guests from the highways and byways, both good and bad. Matthew, Luke and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas recount this same parable but with different outcomes. In Luke, the stand-in guests are the poor, disabled, blind and lame, the epitome of Luke’s Jesus. In the Gospel of Thomas there is nothing very elaborate but a simple dinner. The guests refuse the invitation because it conflicts with their business interests and offshore investments.

The helpful thing about parables is that they rarely answer our questions, or certainly not directly. However much we want to read them like a divine version of the Morse code, they behave more like dreams or poems instead, delivering their meaning in images that talk more to our hearts than our heads. Parables are mysterious, and their mystery has everything to do with their longevity. Left alone, they teach us something different every time we hear them, speaking across great distances of time and place and understanding. A parable washes over you like a wave full of life and light, but an explanation lets you know where you stand. An explanation gives you something to work with, a tool with which to improve yourself and the condition of the world.

No one can say for sure how accurate a reporter Matthew is, but one thing is certain: He warms up to any parable that has to do with judgement and decision! Of all the gospels, Matthew is the only one who waxes eloquent about the end of the world, the only one who mentioned furnaces, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. His is the only gospel that tells the story of the foolish and wise virgins, or the separating of the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the weeds. It is Matthew who adds the details about war against those who reject the invitation and the party-pooper who gets turned out of the party. Matthew is the only gospel writer who appears to want a clear-cut creation, in which things are black or white, good or bad, faithful or faithless, in or out. The conflict with the original guests and reference to fire might allude to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. So Matthew tries to pull Jesus’ teaching forward into the new circumstances that for his community have been hard to handle. And in making the simple parable into an allegory stretches the time frame so that the banquet is served in the midst of the smouldering ruins.

We read into the parable that not all who believe themselves to be guests at God’s banquet belong there. We see that the host will go to great lengths, and look in improbable places, to extend an invitation. This host is the same farmer who had a sheep that got lost. They left the ninety-nine in the wilderness and searched for the one. This is the same host as the farmer who scattered seed on the path, among the thorns, on stony ground and in good soil. This is the same host who when the harvest needed bringing in and everyone – whether they worked all day or just an hour at the end of the day – was paid the same. This is God’s table… We understand that the only credential good enough for life in the kingdom is transformation. We find comfort in the promise that the images of a destroyed city, a torn down holy place; a crucified messiah are replaced and overcome with images of wedding feast.

Life in God’s kingdom begins with an invitation, but that is not the conclusion. Accepting the invitation leads to a changed and transformed life. The unrobed guest does not show the changed life at the banquet, his downfall comes when asked by the host to explain his appearance and he has nothing to say. We are invited to find our place at the table in the words of Colossians “clothed yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

**Prayers of Intercession**

Where are you, Jesus?

Enthroned in glory receiving the alleluias of the saints?

Yes, Lord, that’s where you are, for you are worthy to receive all honour and power.

Where are you, Jesus?

Still washing our feet? Still in prison, still hungry, still without a home?

Yes, Lord, this is also where you are,

for you have promised never to abandon your humble and poor.

Lord whilst still longing to be with you

as those who hunger no more and thirst no more;

whilst cherishing the time

when you will wipe away all tears from our eyes;

help us never to lose sight of the vast need on earth

for food, for shelter, for health and peace.

As in Heaven one shout of praise resounds

so on earth may we act as one to destroy the evils of greed and injustice,

allowing your kingdom to come and your will to be done.

*“On earth as in heaven” from the 1986 URC Prayer Handbook*

When labels of traditional or progressive

blind us to seeing the wisdom in others,

clear our vision until we are open to change.

As you call us: Lord, we come.

When powerful influences distract us or lead us astray,

may we hear the quiet whisper of your wisdom.

May our homes and routines be the territory of your kingdom,

where your purpose guides, and your love rules.

As you call us: Lord, we come.

When we stand against cruelty and unfairness or disease,

we pray for the comfort and healing of your presence.

As you call us: Lord, we come.

Thank you for the honour of being invited to your feast;

transform and change us as by your grace we take our place.

We join together in saying the Lord’s Prayer…

**Offertory**

Creator God, we bring to you what is already yours,

for you to use our gifts and each of us as the givers

to make your love known in your world. Amen

**Blessing**

God - Creator, Redeemer, Keeper,

You have made us in your image.

Though we are many,

through Christ we are one:

each of us bringing gifts, skills, and passions,

our individual selves in response to your call.

Bless us, this day,

as we seek to be your people,

loving and serving you,

our neighbours,

and all creation,

as we pray your kingdom come.

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| **Hymn Suggestions** |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Jesus calls us here to meet him |  | 510 | 28 |  |
| Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult of our life’s restless sea | 355 | 509 | 250 | 359 |
| The Church is wherever God’s people are praising | 583 | 522 |  |  |
| Lord Make Us Servants of Your Peace |  | 527 |  |  |
| One More Step Along the World I Go | 549 | 530 | 476 | 1346 |
| For everyone born a place at the table |  | 685 |  |  |
| Great is thy faithfulness. | 96 | 153 | 51 | 200 |
| O Jesus, I have promised | 509 | 644 | 563 | 501 |
| Lord You Have Come to the Seashore |  | 532 | 558 |  |

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*