

## **Welcome and Call to Worship**

**Opening Song** Come all you people

Praise the Lord!  
Let us give thanks to the Lord, for he is good  
and his steadfast love endures forever.  
May we never forget the Lord our God  
but seek after God's justice that we may know his glory.  
Let us worship the Lord!

Prayer

Lord God, you invite one and all, so here we are.  
You make space for us whoever and wherever we are.  
May we feel your welcome and extend that same grace to others.  
Wherever we have been, whatever brings us to this act of worship,  
may we experience encounter with you,  
O living God, and may that encounter transform our lives.  
However unlikely it may seem, may our encounters with you  
transform our despair into hope, our fear into joy  
and our loss into new beginnings.  
May we know ourselves seen and heard by the living God,  
loved as we are and made new by the intimacy  
of our relationship with Christ.  
Forgive what we have been, renew what we shall be  
and take us from here inspired to serve you in the world.  
Keep on working in us and through us  
until we extend our reach and when we are allowed,  
our arms, in welcome, and you are worshipped  
as you ought to be in every corner of the world.  
For we pray all these things In the name of Jesus Christ,  
who taught us to pray together,  
*Lord's Prayer*  
Amen.

## **Address**

It's coming up to the time of year when we would usually have birthday parties back to back in our family, and though this year, the celebrations will be different, we hope to make them all the more special. So, in keeping with today's parable, I want you to imagine...  
You have a party to plan! You can invite anyone you want to this party. Who would you invite?  
Let your imagination take over. Who have you always wanted to meet? Who do you think would be the 'best' guests to invite? And why?  
As you think this through, plan the menu, the party games and so on. Consider how everyone would fit in? Who would join in the games with the most enthusiasm?  
Give me the details.  
Then, you wait for an RSVP  
Extra cake if you know what that stands for.  
R.S.V.P. comes from the French expression "répondez s'il vous plaît", meaning "please respond".  
Why is it good to respond?  
Why do we feel the need to give excuses for not turning up or doing something?

Now, the day is drawing near, Do you think those who said they'd come will actually show up? Or would they find an excuse not to...

If you had a birthday party and some people made excuses not to go how would they feel?

Have any of you have ever used excuses for not doing something or going somewhere? Why did they give these excuses?

- What has been your biggest excuse for not doing something?
- What tall tale can you imagine to use as an excuse for not cleaning your room, walking your pet for a walk, doing homework, why you have been late home...? Think of something ridiculous.

Now place yourself in this story:

A king's son was getting married. It was going to be the event of the year. Everyone who was anyone was to be invited. Otherwise the king would be dishonoured and laughed at.

So the king made sure all the invites went out to all the right people, the likes of celebrities and dignitaries we came up with earlier.

The king waited for the replies to come back and was shocked and disappointed and hurt at what he read. These were the worst excuses the king had ever heard.

***Which got me thinking...***

Do we ever make excuses to God?

The king was sad and furious so he asked his servants to go into the towns and villages and ask everyone, no matter who they were. The feast was ready and there was food for all. So the servants did as they were asked and people from all walks of life flocked to the wedding, everyone was welcomed.

And Jesus said, this is what the Kingdom is

like: a place for everyone, and enough for everyone.

## **Hymn All people that on earth do dwell**

### **Philippians 4:1-9**

**4** So then, my friends, how dear you are to me and how I miss you! How happy you make me, and how proud I am of you!—this, dear friends, is how you should stand firm in your life in the Lord.

<sup>2</sup>Euodia and Syntyche, please, I beg you, try to agree as sisters in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>And you too, my faithful partner, I want you to help these women; for they have worked hard with me to spread the gospel, together with Clement and all my other fellow workers, whose names are in God's book of the living.

<sup>4</sup>May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

<sup>5</sup>Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. <sup>6</sup>Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. <sup>7</sup>And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. <sup>9</sup>Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you.

### **Matthew 22:1-14**

**22** Jesus again used parables in talking to the people. <sup>2</sup>“The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his servants to tell the invited guests to come to the feast, but they did not want to come. <sup>4</sup>So he sent other servants with this message for the guests: ‘My feast is ready now; my steers and prize calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!’ <sup>5</sup>But the invited guests paid no attention and went about their business: one went to his farm, another to his store, <sup>6</sup>while others grabbed the servants, beat them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was very angry; so he sent his soldiers, who killed those murderers and burned down their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he called his servants and said to them, ‘My wedding feast is ready, but the people I invited did not deserve it. <sup>9</sup>Now go to the main streets and invite to the feast as many people as you find.’ <sup>10</sup>So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, good and bad alike; and the wedding hall was filled with people.

<sup>11</sup>“The king went in to look at the guests and saw a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup>‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ the king asked him. But the man said nothing. <sup>13</sup>Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him outside in the dark. There he will cry and gnash his teeth.’”

<sup>14</sup>And Jesus concluded, “Many are invited, but few are chosen.”

### **A Perplexing Parable**

O Boy! This parable reminds me of the school run home.

When everyone’s speaking at once, telling their stories of the day,

Which sets off someone else’s version of events,

Before they go back to their own story.

You could sit for hours trying to work out

what is going on with this parable.

It is a confusing riot of thoughts and ideas

as if there are two or three different streams of stories here

and somehow you cannot quite grasp one all the way to the end

without getting tangled up and confused with another thought.

All the feelings are probably quite normal because it is

likely that there are at least two different parables here,

and perhaps even a third, all bound up together.

There is a wedding garment parable,

a parable about a king who invited guests

from the highways and byways and

one where a king went out and razed a few villages

because some of the guests dishonoured him

by making excuses not to attend.

In amongst all of this is the background to why these parables

have been included and what they said to Matthew's own community that he made sure they were told in this way.

The first parable is about salvation.

The second is about where Matthew's own community found itself in a debate, and even fallout about who was to be included in the young church and who was not; where did the new Gentile converts find themselves in the scheme of things among the older Jewish inheritors?

Confusion is allowed!

The subtle confusion of the parable(s) is the idea that grace can easily evolve into permission giving; we accept we have grace but once received we can often create rules and institutions around an interpretation of that grace towards others.

There is a rejection in the parable of a 'them and us' attitude to the kingdom but one where the table is open and all are included.

There is also the affirmation of the idea of a meal being one of the central images of the kingdom.

It is an image that has always been with the faith.

It is an image of abundance and welcome in an era where there was a lot of hunger and subsistence.

Such images of generosity are even more exaggerated when there is oppression and poverty.

There is another way of looking at this parable however.

The invites to the wedding go out to all the right people, the A-List.

But when they refuse, they are insulting the King.

The King would have understood that was what was happening: these are shallow excuses being made.

They were meant to be seen as that and the king understood them as that.

The parable is pointing at the religious leaders of the day (not the Jews), but basically the elites.

The King therefore changes all protocol of the time, forgets the elites, and invites everyone, good and bad.

The King would provide wedding attire for guests,  
but there is spotted among them all someone  
who has chosen not to wear such attire and thus offends  
the king by not accepting the generosity and welcome of the king.  
The result is that person ends up with the same fate as the elites.  
There is further confusion with the last verse however.  
Many are called but few are chosen.  
It seems even more elitist, perhaps it would make more sense to say,  
It doesn't really make sense in this context.  
What its original purpose was is difficult to tell.  
But the shape of the parable or parables now suggests once more  
what we always knew but find difficult to cope with in our churches  
that have become institutions bound by traditions  
and unspoken rules: the kingdom is not just for the chosen,  
it is not just for those who have been longest attenders,  
lived by the rules, worked their way up,  
it is also for those we meet in the highways and byways,  
who are just as worthy of God's saving grace,  
and our welcome and care.

### **Prayers of the People**

Loving God, we thank you for the love and care you have  
For all your children.  
We pray that your compassion and kindness would shine through the divisions in a world, where we  
seem incapable of accepting your invitation to welcome and share all that you have given us.  
Lord give us wider arms and bigger hearts  
and greater understanding to know that sharing  
what we have will not diminish us.  
You bless us so that we might bless others.  
So as we pray for wars to end,  
may we refuse to invest in all that causes destruction.  
As we pray for homes for the homeless and food for the hungry  
may we be willing to share the space and the wealth that we hold tightly.  
Prise open our hands and our hearts, to care and share freely.  
Heal the blindness that prevents us from seeing  
and our muteness that prevents us from speaking out against injustice wherever it is found  
and give us wisdom to know how to change things for good and  
how to empower others to enable change too.  
Inclusive God, inspire us to be inclusive too. Amen.

## **Hymn They'll know we are Christians by our Love**

### Closing Words

Each time we meet God throws a party. He is glad we came, delighted we made the effort. You are God's special guests.

Remember this as we leave our time together. God the Creator,  
Jesus the Son, the Spirit our guide, makes time for us each and every day.

### **Blessing**