

9<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Dear Friends,

Hello, how are you? How are you finding life this week? Again, we find ourselves in a changing picture as we continue to travel through a time of pandemic with the changes that come every day. I have been continuing to reflect upon that change, and as I shared a couple of weeks ago, thinking about the changing seasons, especially as the darker nights are upon us, and in our usual pattern of days we would be beginning to plan for Advent and Christmas, and while we will still be doing that it will be for very looking different celebrations.

What won't change of course is the truth of the incarnation, Christ in Jesus is still with us, we will still remember the story of Bethlehem, and ponder the challenge of the prophets, the invitation to celebrate will still be given, the wonder of God in flesh, vulnerable and having humbled himself will still be a significant part of our story.

The invitation will be issued, how we respond is key, just look at this week's Gospel reading:

*Once more Jesus spoke to them 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; and 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.'*  
**Matthew 22: 1-14**

How do you respond to this piece of Scripture? A wedding banquet has been prepared and those who have been invited have chosen not to attend, seemingly without issuing an apology, and so the invitation was re-issued, and again it wasn't accepted, the recipients of the invitation had other things to do it seems, and so finally after one last try at welcoming the intended guests the king decides to gather in all and any who will be prepared to come, both good and bad, and with that the banquet hall is filled.

Then comes the twist, one of those new guests is without a wedding robe, and he was cast out of the banquet. What a strange story, and what we might well ask is going on here. So often when a King is identified in a story the immediate interpretation is that this King is obviously the "God" character, but a close reading of this will I hope draw us to ask questions about the nature of that God. Do we believe in a God who will visit violence upon his people so readily, first the original guests, who may given the nature of the King may well have been acting in a perfectly reasonable way by refusing the invitation, then the twist as one who the King name as friend is tied hand and foot and cast out of the banquet. There is a lot of fear and violence in this parable, and the violence towards the end of the parable highlights the absurdity of the host's suggestion that an invited guest was not worthy of the banquet.

One must ask why the motif of worthiness is a one-way street in this text. If one asks whether this king was fit to rule over his people, he emerges as someone who was deeply undeserving of his power and abused it at will.

Rulers—both ancient and contemporary—have a proclivity to be oppressive and solely focused on their own interests at the expense of others. Will they adopt an approach and policies that are appropriate for their office? Will we hold them accountable for their actions and ask if they are worthy of the power entrusted to them?

It might do us good to consider the context of this parable, Jesus has just ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, this parable is told in the context of that and in the violent shadow of the cross. Might it be that we find God in the form of Jesus, in the “friend” who has not dressed up and played the part required by the King, he has come among the good and the bad, entered into the mess of humanity and is ultimately rejected for it. The invitation to power and to collude with power here is not one that we should be so eager to accept. This speaks powerfully into our world today, into the political machinations and the injustices that abound, in a world that celebrates the strong, we are called by Christ to inhabit his ways, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

I leave you with the words of a hymn:

*Let us build a house  
where love can dwell  
And all can safely live,  
A place where  
saints and children tell  
How hearts learn to forgive.*

*Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
And words are strong and true,  
Where all God's children dare to seek  
To dream God's reign anew.*

*Here the cross shall stand as witness  
And a symbol of God's grace;  
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:*

*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

*Let us build a house where love is found  
In water, wine and wheat:  
A banquet hall on holy ground,  
Where peace and justice meet.*

*Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
Is revealed in time and space;  
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:*

*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

All are welcome, genuinely and truly welcome, not coerced by an angry King, not ushered in by force, but welcomed by the one who in Jesus chose the path of ascent and in the wonderful picture given to us from Celtic Christianity comes bounding down the mountainside with a hand held out to greet us, all of us, good and bad, rich and poor, no matter what our ethnic background, gender or sexuality. All are welcome in the family of God, where justice and mercy are characteristics of the divine kin-dom.

As always, I offer to you the chance to have a chat with me if you would like to.

Many blessings