

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 11/10/20

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Opening affirmation from Philippians 4: 4-9 ¹

⁴ Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again - rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. ⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. ⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me - everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

HYMN – SF 2249 ²

Come, people of the risen King,
Who delight to bring Him praise.
Come, all and tune your hearts to sing
To the morning star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him,
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!
One heart, one voice, O church of Christ, rejoice!

Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
And those weeping through the night.
Come, those who tell of battles won,
And those struggling in the fight.
For His perfect love will never change
And His mercies never cease,
But follow us through all our days
With the certain hope of peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!

Come, young and old from every land,
Men and women of the faith.
Come, those with full or empty hands,
Find the riches of His grace.
Over all the world His people sing –
Shore to shore we hear them call
The truth that cries through every age:
'Our God is all in all!'
Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!

Prayer of praise

Father God, we do indeed come before you as people of our risen King Jesus, delighting to bring you praise. Whatever our circumstances right now, however we're feeling, we choose to praise and worship you today, along with millions of other Christians throughout the world. As we were reminded to do in those words from Philippians we read earlier - we rejoice in our Lord.

Father God, you have blessed us in so many ways and we are eternally grateful. Thank you especially today for your precious gift of peace, a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that is beyond our understanding, a peace that comes when we rest in you.

Thank you too that you are a faithful God who never changes in this rapidly changing world. Thank you that we can put our trust in you and that our future is safe in your hands. Amen.

Prayer of Confession ³

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins.

Father, forgive us:

For turning away from you, and ignoring your will for our lives;

For behaving just as we wish, without thinking of you;

For failing you by what we do, and think and say;

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you by temptations in the world about us;

For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son.

Silence

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to Your truth, strengthen us to do Your will and give us the joy of Your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading – Matthew 22: 1-10 ⁴

¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴ '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."

⁵ 'But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." ¹⁰ 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.

Talk 1

Spare a thought for those couples who had just about managed to decide which 30 friends and family to invite to their wedding and who therefore to disappoint, only to be told that the maximum attendance is now 15. Could you manage to choose just 15 friends and family for among those who attended your wedding? Those dilemmas are in stark contrast to the bizarre happenings during the wedding planning in the parable story in today's reading. There seems no limit on numbers but strangely all those invited refused to attend and they didn't simply politely decline the offer either, did they? So what is going on here in this story with a meaning? What might its meaning be? What are the traps for the unwary in trying to understand it?

The moment in Jesus' life when he told this story is particularly important. He has just entered Jerusalem to great public acclaim. Everyone, it seems, wants to join in with Jesus, to go to his party if you like. Yet, within a few days, he would be abandoned by the crowds and his closest friends to a humiliating public execution on a Roman cross. This story is about God's offer to celebrate with Him the high point of his son's life, like a wedding day. It is something to be shared and celebrated with feasting, dancing and song. Now when it comes to this momentous event it is not like a normal wedding where you may get a few months or perhaps a year's notice, this event has been on the calendar from the dawn of time fixed in the purposes of God and announced long in advance. It is there in the record, for example Isaiah 25: 6-8 points to a celebration in this place.

'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'

Here we see the feast on the mountain (Jerusalem has long been known as the city on a hill, Mount Zion) clearly linked with the destruction of death for ever (the shroud that enfolds all peoples as Isaiah poetically puts it) and the wiping away of tears from all faces. This is a multi-layered rich prophecy, in part it is about what Jesus did on the hill or mount of Calvary, outside the walls of the city of God, Jerusalem – an event just about to take place when Jesus told his parable story. The problem was that the Jewish people and their leaders had not accepted God's invitation to join in with his plan to rescue humanity and to destroy death once and for all. They rejected the message. Some were distracted by worldly concerns; others were so anti they ill-treated the people who spoke God's message. At this point we must tread carefully. The God we know revealed through the Bible is not vengeful and capricious like the king in the story but generous and welcoming paradoxically like the king in the story. We always have to be careful with these stories. They have one main point, not all the detail needs to cross refer. We need to leave room for the storyteller to embellish his story for dramatic effect in order to make its main point. Even so we know that within a few years of Jesus' death which was a clear failure to come to the wedding party, the city of Jerusalem along with its temple was destroyed by the Romans. This then is another story told by Jesus against the religious leaders of his day who would spurn, reject and arrange for Him to be killed as they had rejected God's messengers the prophets. It is a dangerous provocative tale to tell. So before we come to the conclusion of the story let us remember and give thanks for the Father's love in sending Jesus and Jesus' sacrifice as we join in with this hymn.

Hymn - SF 780 ⁵

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the chosen one
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer,
But this I know with all my heart,
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Talk 2

The final part of the story, like any good story, contains the main point of it, the punch line – it is a shocking and surprising ending. God's wedding banquet invitation, having been snubbed by the first guests, is enjoyed and appreciated by outsiders, those who dwell on the street corners, the undeserving. They are the ones after all who throughout Jesus' ministry understood him – those who got it. Men and women like Bartimaeus, Mary Magdalene, like the unnamed woman who touched the hem of his garment, like the leper and the paralysed man, all of whom had nothing. They lacked what might be expected respectability and status, often even a name but who certainly enthusiastically received the rich abundance of the banquet Jesus came to bring as a gift – as the feast of love, blessing hope and eternal life that is at the heart of the Kingdom of Heaven. God's kingdom blessings have to be received as an unexpected gift they cannot be earned but as we have seen they can be rejected. They can be missed because of distraction, inattention or wrong priorities and there are consequences for refusing the invitation, for not taking the place with your name on it at the wedding feast of the kingdom. Who do you know who hasn't yet heard about the place waiting for them? Is that you? Who can you share the invitation with? Who does not enjoy a wedding especially one as lavish as this and all paid for. It is free to attend because the price has been paid, paid remarkably, by the bridegroom. In the words of a song by Graham Kendrick 'The price is paid come let us enter in to all that Jesus died to make our own. For every sin more than enough He gave, and bought our freedom from each guilty stain.'

Response

Lord, you sent your Son not to condemn, but to save, so we pray:

For all who reject your loving invitation: **turn their hearts.**

For all who trust in their own self-righteousness: **open their eyes.**

For any who consider themselves beyond redemption because of their unworthiness or failures: **reveal the truth.**

For those who are seeking and searching for meaning and faith:

show them the way home.

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we may be courageous in sharing the invitation, in demonstrating Your Kingdom and in encouraging a joyful and eager response to You. **Amen.**

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- For prisoners, prison staff, families of prisoners and prison chaplains at the start of prisons week.
- For those who struggle with mental ill-health, especially young people and all whose condition has been made worse by the lockdown.
- For those who find themselves in debt as a result of delayed benefit payments, unemployment or unexpected bills. For the work of CAP's debt coaches and the success of the new reset the debt campaign.
- For those who have not heard the good news of their personal invitation to God's banquet of new life, hope, freedom and blessing. For opportunities to tell someone this week of God's love for them.
- For those we know in need family, friends members of the church to which you belong. Name them before God now.
- For ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN STF 363 ⁶

My Jesus, my Saviour,

Lord, there is none like You.

All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of Your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter,

tower of refuge and strength,

let every breath, all that I am,

never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing
power and majesty, praise to the King.

Mountains bow down

and the seas will roar

at the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands.

Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand.

Nothing compares to the

promise I have in You.

Final Blessing

The love of the Lord Jesus draw us to Himself;
the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in His service;
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our hearts;
and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. Amen.

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