

Worship Outline including a Reflection for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
Opening Verse of Scripture Philippians 4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Collect: Prayer for the Day

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First Reading: Exodus 32.1-14

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.' They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ' The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.'

But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven,

and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.” And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Second Reading: Philippians 4.1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 22.1-146

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; 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.'

Reflection

'Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'

In the Holy Gospel reading from Matthew this week we read about a very special invitation to a banquet. It is not just an ordinary party to which a man invites guests, it is an invitation from a king. When kings threw banquets and invited you along you went, not because you necessarily wanted to, but because it was expected. It's just like the boss inviting you round for a meal, if you want to get on you go, you don't say you have a better offer or make excuses. So, the best food and drink would have been prepared, and servants were sent out to "summon the invited guests to the feast." According to the custom of the time, the guests would already received the invitation and were waiting for when things were prepared and they received the announcement to come to the feast. The guests had already accepted the invitation and been catered for! Yet in the story from Jesus those who the king invited turned down the invitation. They didn't turn it down because there was something that really prevented them from going, they just made lame excuses. Frankly it is all rather strange and it becomes even more confusing when we read that the reaction of some is not just poor excuses but they kill the servants who bring the invitation.

This is a parable which doesn't leave a lot to the imagination and those who heard it would have a pretty good idea what Jesus was getting at. The King is God and the people who were invited were the Jews. God was planning the great party which the Jewish people had known about and waited for a long time, but now at the last minute they were refusing. The servants who were killed were the prophets who had proclaimed the coming kingdom and had been ridiculed and killed.

So what about those who came? Since the guests who were invited refused, the invitation went out instead to all and sundry. People who would never have imagined being invited to such an event heard the call, labourers, down and outs, criminals and just ordinary folk. Nobody who came would be able to boast of anything they had done to get there. They could claim no privilege or rank. None of them had a special status. They came because they were hungry, not because they could afford it or were posh. So the parable becomes our

story too. We are now the recipients of God's gracious hospitality and generosity. We are Christian people because of God's generosity, not because of any good we may have done. We claim no right and we feel privileged to find ourselves in the banquet hall. We are from the highways and byways no longer. We are honoured guests. Just like the guests invited to the banquet in the story, each one of us is invited as a special guest by God to his celebration. It is a truly remarkable thing that God should bother with us at all and yet he goes so far as to make us honoured guests.

In the midst of a troubled and turbulent world, where the frailty of life is ever before us, the simple message of this parable should come to us as a great reassurance. In spite of the seeming unimportance which attaches to us in the universe, nevertheless our lives are significant. Life might so often seem cheap and unimportant and yet we are individually watched over and cared for by God. The realisation that God is involved with each of us should change the way that we think about things, life is no longer a series of abstract choices, we are not adrift subject the vagaries of life. This message should cause us to have much peace and a sense of purpose for the future which gives real meaning to our lives.

Sadly, for many people this is simply not the case, offered such a magnificent invitation they choose to ignore the blessings of God and miss out on the generosity of God. The message of the story is clear, if you choose not to go, then somebody else will take your place. For this reason, we should not be slow to respond but willingly answer God's call on our lives. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Holy and blessed God, you have fed us with the body and blood of your Son and filled us with your Holy Spirit: may we honour you, not only with our lips but in lives dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.