

Call to worship

Here we are Lord, come amongst us.
Here we are, seeking to meet with you.
Move, by your Spirit, that we might encounter you again, learn from you, worship you.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymn: For the beauty of the earth

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
*Christ, our God to you we raise
this our sacred hymn of praise*

For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light:
*Christ, our God, to you we raise
this our sacred hymn of praise*

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,

friends on earth and friends above
For all gentle thoughts and mild:
*Christ, our God to you we raise
this our sacred hymn of praise*

For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven
*Christ, our God, to you we raise
this our sacred hymn of praise*

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Opening Prayers

O Lord as we enter the season of autumn, we are mindful of creations last hurrah,
of taste and smell and sight, before it is blanketed in winter's protection.

In our transitory uncertain world the familiarity of the seasons is comforting.
Yet creation is but a foretaste of the heavenly realms.

We have glimpsed the glorious in Jesus your Son who introduces us to life without end
and heralds a hope for what is to come which orientates our lives in the present.

Yet even though we have been invited to this banquet of abundance we have been guilty of
taking your provision for granted, squandering your hospitality and your extravagant love.

We confess our negligence in response to your kindness. We seek your forgiveness so that
the door to the heavenly feast can be reopened.

Help us O Lord to see your provision laid out before us in joy and in sorrow, in times when
we are sure and when life seems uncertain.

For seasons come and seasons go but your love is constant and true.

We offer these prayers in and through the name of your Son
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We will now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings Philippians 4:1-9

¹ 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.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ 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.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

Matthew 22:1-14

22 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ 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.’ ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ 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.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Reflections on the readings:

I wonder where we place ourselves within today’s Gospel story – this story that Jesus told.

The key characters are:

- The pre-invited guests who didn’t turn up.
- The second group made up of the good and the bad.
- The one banished as he wasn’t dressed appropriately.

Which one are you?

Let’s see.

Jesus told this story in the Temple to a group of Jewish religious leaders, and it is the third story of a small group, including the parable of the two sons and also the parable of the tenants that we heard last Sunday. In each story the Jewish leaders were placed under judgement. Interestingly the stories come immediately after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the holy Temple by Jesus. So the Messiah confronts the Jewish authorities by his words and his actions.

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I wonder if we find ourselves associating with the second group in the story. Priding ourselves on the fact that we can spot the first guests' mistake, amazed that they could not see Jesus for who he was..... Hold fire though because one of our group has been picked out as he wasn't wearing the right clothes. This doesn't seem to resonate with how we see the hospitality of the kingdom, or the grace of a compassionate God. So we might discriminate against him as an outsider of the fold assuming him to be part of the first group or a foreigner to our group.

This story begins pleasantly enough, after all we all enjoy a good wedding. However the wedding described here for the king's son turns sour, because the guests didn't turn up and within the second group there was an infiltrator who was banished into the outer darkness. Those who want a simple happy ending will be disappointed today.

If we assume the first group are the Jews, and the second group are the Gentiles, then we can conclude that everyone was invited to the banquet. Therefore God's grace is sufficient for ALL, but there has to be a response, such an invite demands a reaction. There needs to be a transformative dimension to such grace. If that grace is not taken up or accepted then there are consequences. The person inappropriately dressed whilst offered grace did not accept it, he did not become obedient, nor was he clothed with Christ. Galatians 3:27, "If we are baptized into Christ, we are clothed with Christ" that relationship becomes transformational.

The challenging element of this passage is that whilst we might associate with the second group who were welcomed in, we each have the potential to be the third person or the first group who turn their back on the invite, ignore grace and are indifferent to the selfless act of love of Jesus on the cross. We have been invited to the banquet, we have a duty not to wallow in that position but to clothe ourselves with Christ and allow grace to be a part of our lives and our interactions with others. This day and every day. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Everlasting God, we come to you, as a world and a people in need. We approach, seeking acceptance, forgiveness, inspiration and a fresh hope for the week ahead.

Everlasting God, we look to you to be our guide for the week ahead. By your probing, inspiring spirit, help us to live this week immersed in prayer, to look for opportunities to channel your divine nature into the world around us.

Uncreated One, we pray for a natural world damaged by human activity. We mourn the wounds of creation created by greenhouse gases, irresponsible deforestation, profit-driven pollution and the destruction of natural habitats.

Uncreated One, help us to remain environmentally minded: to recognise that all the world around us is yours and we should treat it accordingly. Inspire us to call for change in policy and attitudes amongst world leaders, and guide us in the day-to-day activities of recycling, responsible shopping and ethical living.

God of firm foundations, we hold up before you this day those who face insecurity and fragility. We pray for those facing painful decisions in the coming days and weeks, and for all in financial difficulty, from the rough sleepers in our own streets to starving people in South Sudan.

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God of firm foundations, help us to remain grounded in you, in our thoughts, words and actions. By your Spirit, we look to you to guide us as we reach out to those in need and stand with the fearful.

Loving God, we pray for a suffering world: for those affected by disease, war, food shortages or unemployment. We look to you, God of love, for hope, inspiration and light in a world that can appear hateful, hopeless and dark.

Loving God, teach us to love. Guide us to feel as you feel, to want what you want, that our hearts would be tuned to love.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hymn As we gather, Father, seal us

As we gather Father seal us
In the love that knows no fear
Draw us heal us reconcile us
May there be a place of refuge here

Who share one Living Bread
One Father's love
One Saviour's grace
One Spirit's breath
One holy communion

No more outcasts, no more strangers
all dividing walls are down
here is love that redefines us
Dignifies the least and lowest one

Who share one Living Bread
One Father's love
One Saviour's grace

One Spirit's breath
One holy communion

Source of joy, belonging, friendship
Form your family likeness here
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
That the world may know our God is near

Who share one Living Bread
One Father's love
One Saviour's grace
One Spirit's breath
One holy communion

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Blessing

Go in the name of Jesus, who stands on the mount and changes the story for humanity.
Go in the name of the Creator, who breathes life into all creation, even today.
Go in the name of the Spirit, moving alongside and within you, this day and forever.

Amen.