

Sunday 11 October 2026

Liverpool Parish Church

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

OT: Isaiah 25:1-9

NT: Philippians 4:1-9

Gp: Matthew 22:1-14

This last week I read that Edinburgh had been voted one of Britain's friendliest cities, and what a handsome city it is, but for the purposes of my sermon I'm going to draw on some old and unreconstituted prejudices.

It used to be said that a stranger arriving in Glasgow would be met with an invitation to come in for tea, whereas in chillier Edinburgh the default response to visitors would be the rather meaner, "Ah. You'll have had your tea."

Today's scriptures present us with a far starker contrast, between generosity and cruelty. The parable we just heard has often been presented as a fierce reminder that God is the King, and we are ungrateful, not turning up to his banquet in the right spiritual or moral clothing. And so we deserve the fate that befalls the unwilling guest at the end of the story, bound, and cast out into Hell. I know a few priests who will be enjoying delivering a scolding this morning, and of course some people enjoy being told they're snivelling worms.

But the discomfort and dissonance you might have felt, hearing this story of Jesus' is not to be dismissed as soft centred liberal mushy thinking, or worldliness, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, encouraging us to read the story with more insight into how it must have been heard when first told.

Jesus and his followers knew about kings - petty kings like the one in the parable, a classic bully. Why do the original guests turn down the invitation to the royal wedding banquet? Is it perhaps because they know that he's the kind of host who likes to ridicule and humiliate his guests. People in the First Century knew that in the Holy Land King Herod had a reputation for such crass behaviour. As the Christian gospel spread to Rome and beyond, the behaviour of emperors like Nero and Caligula would have been in people's minds - figures who enjoyed killing their guests, and turning the sanctity of marriage on its head, just because they could.

Christ's followers were the poor, put upon people of his time. Not people like the king, who ends up dragging in the impoverished to provide an audience for his son's wedding feast.

"my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved."

Philippians 4.1

Jesus Christ invites us all into a relationship with him that has always been compared to marriage, a relationship of trust, faithfulness, fruitfulness, and mutual love.

In St Paul's beautiful words in the letter to the first Christians in the city of Philippae, the Philippians, he talks about standing firm 'in the Lord'. That's a favourite metaphor of the Apostle's. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. We aren't subsumed or controlled, but rather flourish, because we are loved, and saved from sin and death by the grace of God.

The oldest of our readings today expresses this with the poetic power of a great prophet,

"he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken."

Isaiah 25.8

Christ's wedding feast is the one we celebrate here. He is inviting us today, not with threats or humiliation, but clothing us in his salvation, the best dressed of wedding guests, baptised into everlasting life. We have been called, and by adoption, chosen, to receive and to share the hope of everlasting life.

So, let us approach the altar with humility, penitence, certainly, but above all confidence – this invitation is not a trick, but trustworthy and true. Enter into the joy of the Lord, and find your joy in him. Let's savour those words of St Paul, and try to live by them,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious 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, brothers and sisters, 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. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you."

Philippians 4.4-9

Fr Philip Anderson