

October 11<sup>th</sup> 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to your Lord our strength and Redeemer

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This morning I am not going to speak for long as after this service we will be holding our Annual meetings and there are three to get through, though two of them are usually quite short. The longer meeting is a chance to look back over the previous year and to see how things went to see what we have achieved and see if what we are doing fits in with our parish vision.

In this as in most parishes there will be some good things to report and some things that need a bit more attention, some things that have worked well and some less well, some things we have stopped doing and some new things that have been started.

I think this year it will feel a little strange, the meetings are usually held in April and the previous year is still quite fresh in people's minds but this year the meetings are being held much later and this year has been so different that much of what is reported on might feel as if it happened a long time ago and some of it might now feel rather out of date. I did hear one person comment that maybe we shouldn't bother holding meetings this year just hold everything over until next April and someone else suggested that we be allowed to report not just on 2019 but also on the first half of 2020.

If that were to be allowed there would have to be synodical legislation to allow such things as church officers to continue in post and while that happened to allow them to continue until November I do think it is probably best to have kept as close as possible to our usual patterns.

Why do I think that? Well in the first reading today we heard the words, 'stand firm in the Lord' I think we need to stand firm, to keep going, following as far as possible our usual yearly round, that no matter what is going on around us we need to keep trusting in God, trusting that God is in the midst of it with us.

Trying to follow as best we can the advice St Paul gave to the Galatians 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

We need to take our fear our anxiety about these troubled times to God and keep on doing as far as possible what we always do, keep on doing what we say we will do in our parish vision that is loving God and serving the community.

Today's Gospel was about a party and the behaviour of the party guests. The invites had gone out and been accepted but on the day when the king's servants went to collect the guests they had all changed their minds all had found other things that needed their attention for some their business, others their fields, some it seems were so offended when a second lot of servants were sent to collect them that they turned on them and killed them. The king enraged sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then the king sent his servants to find new guests telling them to invite anyone they saw in the streets. So the servants collected up and brought in anyone they could find including both 'the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests'.

Now I could talk for quite a while about this part of the reading, who the characters in the parable represent and so on but there isn't time today, so please just accept my word that it means that each and every person in the world is invited by God to be a guest at the banquet he will hold in his Kingdom at the end of time.

What I want us think about today is the next part of the story, the bit where one of the guests is turned away for being improperly dressed. It might seem that the king is being rather harsh after all the man hadn't been expecting to go to a party but what it is really telling us is that we who have had invitations to God's banquet should at least try to be ready for it, learning what it means to be a guest at his table, learning about what it means to be a follower of His ways, learning how to not to let anyone or anything get in the way of us preparing to attend that party.

And that will mean that no matter what is going on around us no matter how good or bad our lives are no matter what, our focus should be on preparing for God's kingdom. That means not putting things off because 'at the moment my business needs my attention or at the moment I need to concentrate on other stuff. Yes that stuff does need doing it, it does need attention, it is important and it does matter but it is also important not to neglect our faith, to continue no matter what else is going on around us to keep our eyes on God.

We need to be careful not to get so caught up in worldly things that we neglect the things of the Spirit.

It is all too easy during these difficult times to get caught up in or worn down by the battles going on around us, the battle against the virus, the political battles and all the talk of news, fake news and who is right about what and what we should be doing about it all, and then there are the more personal battles maybe family problems or our own fears and anxieties.

Again these things do matter but we should be careful not let them stop us doing the work God sets before us the work of growing the kingdom. Making sure the party is full of guests.

One of the things that has been noticed this year is how many people are turning to the church for some answers, how many more people are tuning in to the online services, how many are turning to prayer or asking for prayer and though I don't much like military metaphors we are like the soldiers in the story we are the ones who need deliver the party invites God has already written out. Our lives need to show that despite the anxieties of this present time the work of the Kingdom continues.

There is some good advice from St Paul about how we can do this Let me read you some of the words of this morning Galatians reading,

‘brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice.

We can not only think about the things Paul mentions but try to demonstrate them by our behaviour, showing that no matter what life throws at us we will deal with it in a way in that would please God.

And those words ‘Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

We can, though it might be hard to do, practice putting our anxieties before God and letting God deal with them, I don't mean becoming passive and doing nothing but by letting God take the anxiety and getting on with doing what we can for ourselves and others in this troublesome year. Letting God's peace replace the fear and God's hand lead us forward.

<sup>7</sup> ‘And’ may ‘the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus’ and allow you to tell people of the open invitation to Gods banquet and help them discover the dress code.

**Parish Prayer** Lord, help us to take our eyes off ourselves and turn them to the community around us, so we are less concerned with what we have done than what remains to be done. Save us from being a parish that is too inward looking. May our vision be enlarged, our strength renewed and our love for you and your children inspire us to do great things for your glory. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord Amen

Philippians 4.1-9.

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

<sup>2</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

### Matthew 22:1-14

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

<sup>4</sup> ‘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.”

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

<sup>8</sup> ‘Then he said to his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup> He asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?” The man was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

<sup>14</sup> ‘For many are invited, but few are chosen.’