

Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church
Sunday 22nd March 2020

Welcome

Sadly, we cannot meet together today. However, we are able to worship together by using the devotions below. Our theme is Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet. Our first song might seem a little odd but as you will find it is most appropriate as the parable tells of an invitation to a wedding feast extended to everyone.

Call to Worship: Psalm 95:1-3

*O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*

Song [Come to a wedding, come to a blessing](#) *Click on the link*



**Prayer of Praise, Confession,
Assurance of Forgiveness and Lord's Prayer**



Eternal God, you are great and mighty, powerful and Holy. To you be glory honour and praise. You alone are the source of life and love; without love all we do is worth nothing. Everything we enjoy comes from you. Thank you for your unbounded generosity and for all the blessings of this life.

We confess our ingratitude for your goodness, our selfishness in using your gifts, that we have failed to love you and been selective in our love of others and we ask your forgiveness.

Thank you that you love us so much that you sent Jesus Christ to live among us and that he died and rose again so that through faith in him we are forgiven our sin and renewed. With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we sing your praise. Blessing and honour and glory and power be yours for ever.

Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love that we may worship you now with thankful hearts and to serve you in our lives together.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Good News

Louis Vuitton, the France based cosmetic company has announced that they will be using the production lines of their perfume and cosmetic brands to manufacture 'large quantities of hydroalcoholic gels' (otherwise known as hand sanitiser.) They will be delivering these free of charge to the health authorities.

Give thanks to God for this compassionate initiative.

A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus

Merciful God, we place in your care all who are ill or in pain, knowing that whenever danger threatens you hold us safe. Comfort, heal and restore them to full strength. Grant skill, patience and resilience to all who are caring for the sick, and guide all seeking a cure or vaccine. We pray for reassurance and peace for those anxious about livelihoods and financial solvency.

In the name of Jesus who laid his hands on the sick and healed them, Amen.



Old Testament Bible Passages:

We are just two weeks away from Holy Week. A lot happened during that first Holy Week in Jerusalem. Jesus entered the city to the acclamation of the crowd waving their palm branches. He taught a great deal. One of the parables Jesus used was about a great wedding banquet and we'll read that in a moment or two. But first, a couple of Old Testament passages. These refer to the kind of relationship God has with his people. It's a very intimate relationship; like that between husband and wife. Israel is God's bride – God her husband

Look out for the marriage metaphor.

Isaiah 54: 1, 5-8 (NIV)

*“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in labour!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than the children of her who is married,” says the Lord.
For your Maker is **your husband**,
the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the Lord has called you
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.
For a brief moment I deserted you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing anger for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,”
says the Lord, your Redeemer.*

Jeremiah 31: 31- 34 (NIV)

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of
Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant
that I made with their fathers on the day when I took
them by the hand to bring them out of the land of
Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was
their **husband**, declares the Lord. For this is the
covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law
within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I
will be their God, and they shall be my people. And
no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each
his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all
know me, from the least of them to the greatest,
declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and
I will remember their sin no more.”*

Holy Matrimony

I have a wedding to conduct in a couple of weeks. Sadly the bride and groom have postponed the party but still want to proceed with the wedding. So, please pray for Amelie and David, and their families.

A marriage is an intimate relationship between two people. Husband and wife commit themselves to one another. That's the kind of relationship God seeks to have with his faithful people Israel.

The context of Isaiah is that the exile is was like a divorce, but now the Lord calls out to reclaim his bride seeking reconciliation. Jeremiah reaches back to this separation, and his people breaking the covenant given on Sinai. God will be a husband, there will be a new relationship, not written in stone but in people's hearts. God will create love and fidelity so that everyone from the least to the greatest will know the Lord. This new covenant will restore the broken marriage, heal the broken family and create a new future for the people. God will forgive their sins that caused the marital rift and he will restore his bride, Israel, to himself.

God's love is a love that will not let his people go.

Song [O love that will not let me go](#) *Click on the link*



New Testament Readings

Matthew 22:1-14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants¹ to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again, he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Revelation 21: 1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The Wedding Feast

For centuries weddings have been celebrated with a meal. Certainly, in first century Israel wedding banquets were hugely important events. You'll remember Jesus saved the day at one wedding when the wine ran out. When we have big events in our lives, baptisms, eighteenth birthdays, we often have a big party with lots of food.

In first century Judea, it was customary to issue an initial invitation, to which the guests would indicate, their intention to attend. Then, when the meal was ready, a second invitation was delivered calling the guests to attend, stating the exact day and time. So, it was rather like telling everyone "I'm getting married at the end of May will you come?" and then a little later giving the precise details.

As we've already seen, in both Jewish and Christian scripture, the imagery of a marriage is used to express the intimate relationship between God and his people where the banquet stands for the Kingdom of God.

In the parable, the king, God, had sent the initial invitation – to the Jews, through his prophets. Then God sent his servant, Jesus Christ, to tell them that the banquet was ready, the kingdom is here! But this final invitation was refused. In the story it was not only refused but the servants, the messengers, were ill-treated and killed. We know what happened to Jesus!

This parable is about the arrival of the Messiah and the coming of God's Kingdom. Israel's leaders and the many people who followed them were invited to the wedding party God was throwing for his Son, the Messiah. But they didn't want to know and refused to attend.

Nevertheless, the wedding feast still went ahead, but with guests from the streets. God's invitation goes out to all and sundry. Words from Mary's song on her conceiving Jesus come to mind; "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has exalted the humble and meek." (Luke 1: 51-52) God's invitation is for everyone, Gentiles as well as Jews, poor and rich.

God invites us, you and me, to his heavenly banquet, the eternal banquet. God's invitation is to a feast as joyous as a wedding. Christianity's great fun!

Many were invited, but few chosen. Indeed, all were invited but some chose not to attend. In the Old Testament the 'chosen' are the people of Israel, but now the 'chosen' stands for all those who share the inheritance of God's covenant people. Whether or not we accept the invitation will determine whether or not we are chosen. There is a divine call - and a human response.

However, eternal life starts now and goes on for eternity; so what of the invitation to be part of the celebrations here on earth? Do we always put God's Banquet first? Or are there other things in our lives that we feel we must do. The people in the parable that turned down the invitation were not going off to do something wrong or bad. One went to his farm and another to his business. These things were clearly more important to them than attending the banquet. It is so easy for us to busy ourselves with the things of everyday life that we can forget the things of eternity.

To quote William Barclay, "a man can be so busy making a living that he fails to make a life; he can be so busy with the administration and organisation of life that he forgets life itself."

What kind of excuses do we make for not joining in God's celebration? – It's the wrong time, the wrong type of service, the wrong music, I must visit friends, or weed the garden! A banquet isn't a banquet without lots of people – we all need to be there! ... or the meal becomes a dinner party or perhaps, just a TV dinner!

All and sundry came to the feast, people found on the street by the King's servant. The tax collectors and prostitutes, the lame and the poor; the voiceless, all the people who thought they had been forgotten and that God's Kingdom wasn't for them. They were delighted to be invited and to find that God's good news, and his Messiah, were for them too.

Many would not have had the appropriate dress for a wedding, but the King provided even this. In this way the poor would not be ashamed of their rags and the rich could not flaunt themselves in their ball-gowns and tuxedos (or the first century Palestinian equivalent). The generous King provided not only the food but everything the guests needed. All would be equal in the sight of the King.

However, one man decided to reject the King's garments and wear his own clothes. He was thrown out.

That's a bit like being thrown out of a nightclub for wearing jeans and trainers. All your friends are inside having a good time and they'll be talking about it tomorrow and for days to come. You're left outside on your own; and tomorrow you'll be unable to join in with your friend's recollections, you'll feel excluded, perhaps even ridiculed for not being ready.

Clearly, the man felt that his own clothes were good enough and didn't need the clothes the King provided. Not to accept the king's generosity would have been insulting.

However good and acceptable to God we **think** we are, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment", to quote Isaiah 64:6. That's the human dilemma. We are not fit to be seen in the presence of God nor worthy to sit at his table. Yet God invites us to do just that, and, as we've seen, he provides the clothes and all we need, when we turn to him in faith. St Paul writes, "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" or "put on Christ like a garment". (Galatians 3:26-27) To quote Isaiah again; "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10)

God has provided the feast of the Kingdom, the wedding feast for his Son. The good news is that the invitation goes far and wide. Everyone is invited into a Kingdom in which love, justice and truth, forgiveness and mercy rule unhindered. These are the clothes to wear. If we refuse, we are saying that we'd rather stay away from the banquet.

Above all, because of Christ's work on the cross, the banquet is prepared, the invitation is offered, the clothes are ready for us to put on and the door is open wide for us to walk through. Most importantly of all, remember God's relationship with his people is that of a husband. The banquet he offers is for laid out in honour of his bride, the new Israel, God's faithful people, you and me.

Song [For everyone born a place at the table](#) [click on the link](#)



Prayers of the People for the People

Jesus Christ, as a wife devotes herself to her husband, so we devote ourselves to you.
We promise to love and to cherish you, and to be faithful and loyal to you,
now and forever.

You embrace us in a love that knows no end.

Fill us with a power that overcomes.

Encourage us with a word that nourishes.

Inspire us with a hope that sustains.

Comfort us with a peace that endures and bring wholeness of body, mind and spirit.



Lord Jesus, you are with us in sickness and in health, in good times and bad.
For those weighed down by ill health, bring wholeness to body, mind and spirit.

Bless those on a journey of recovery from illness or surgery.
Grant strength, patience, and freedom from pain and restoration of health.

For those weighed down by worry, bring wisdom, peace and reassurance.
For those weighed down by fear, bring freedom, release and liberation.
For those weighed down by sadness, bring comfort, strength and joy.

For all whose nights are broken by pain, discomfort, anxiety, and so many other reasons,
leaving them irritable, tired and unable to concentrate, refresh their minds, grant patience
in times of stress. Reach out and touch them so they know you are there,
give them comfort and light even in the darkest of times.
that they will have peace and rest.

Heal the hurts, both inside and out, that make life difficult each day.
Ease the pain, loosen the chains, bringing freedom in their place.

For all whose days and nights are full of conflict, violence and war:
 people innocent, guilty, injured, orphaned, or widowed;
 politicians, peacemakers, and relief workers.
bring comfort, compassion, sustenance, repentance, forgiveness, healing, safety, love,
and a peace that endures.

Lord, this beautiful world is yours, created in love, gifted by grace.
Help us understand it, to care and protect it, and when disaster strikes be there for us.

Be compassionate to those who wait for death and those who mourn giving them the
certainty that your faithful people will feast at the heavenly banquet you have prepared for
us and that you will wipe every tear from their eyes.

We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

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Benediction and Blessing

Eternal God, you have fed us today with your holy Word and we have feasted at your
table of delights. Equip us to take your invitation, to sit at your heavenly banquet, to the
world so that you may gather people of every race, language and way of life, to share in
the one eternal wedding feast of the Lamb, Jesus Christ the Lord.

[Blessing](#) [click on the link](#)