



**Written Service Sunday October 15th**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Rev Jason McMahon-Riley**

Charity number 1134226

## Call to worship

Rejoice in the Lord always. Say it again: **Rejoice!**  
The Lord is near; **the Lord is here.**  
Rejoice in the Lord always. Say it again: **Rejoice!**

## A prayer of adoration

Generous God, we kneel in awe at your willingness to draw us into your fellowship; in wonder at your gracious invitation to join the feast of life; in gratitude at your care for each one of us; in humility for your faithfulness towards each one of us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we kneel and worship and adore you. **Amen.**

## Hymn | StF 24 Come now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God  
Come

One day every tongue will confess  
You are God  
One day every knee will bow  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those  
Who gladly choose You now

Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God

## A prayer of confession

Gracious God, you invite us to join you in caring for the vulnerable,  
and we hurt you when we do not accept your invitation.

**We are sorry and ask your forgiveness.**

You invite us to share the good news of your love,  
and we hurt you when we do not accept your invitation.

**We are sorry and ask your forgiveness.**

You invite us to clothe ourselves with compassion and humility,  
and we hurt you when we do not accept your invitation.

**We are sorry and ask your forgiveness.**

You invite us to take our place at your table,  
and we hurt you when we do not accept your invitation.

**We are sorry and ask your forgiveness, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Eternal God, you clothe us with forgiveness, you cover us with your grace, you feed us with your word, you robe us with your generosity, you root us in your faithfulness, you gather us in your love, you invite us to be your disciples, and you go all out to draw us all in and call us each by name. **Amen.**

### Old Testament Reading | Isaiah 25: 1-9

**25** Lord, you are my God;  
I will exalt you and praise your name,  
for in perfect faithfulness  
you have done wonderful things,  
things planned long ago.  
**2** You have made the city a heap of rubble,  
the fortified town a ruin,  
the foreigners' stronghold a city no more;  
it will never be rebuilt.  
**3** Therefore strong peoples will honour you;  
cities of ruthless nations will revere you.  
**4** You have been a refuge for the poor,  
a refuge for the needy in their distress,  
a shelter from the storm  
and a shade from the heat.  
For the breath of the ruthless  
is like a storm driving against a wall  
**5** and like the heat of the desert.  
You silence the uproar of foreigners;  
as heat is reduced by the shadow of a  
cloud,  
so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

**6** On this mountain the Lord Almighty will  
prepare  
a feast of rich food for all peoples,  
a banquet of aged wine—  
the best of meats and the finest of wines.  
**7** On this mountain he will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;  
**8** he will swallow up death forever.  
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears  
from all faces;  
he will remove his people's disgrace  
from all the earth.  
The Lord has spoken.

**9** In that day they will say,  
"Surely this is our God;  
we trusted in him, and he saved us.  
This is the Lord, we trusted in him;  
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

### Hymn | StF 465 Guide me, O though great Jehovah

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  
Feed me now and evermore  
Feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream shall flow;  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong deliverer,  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to Thee;  
I will ever give to Thee.

## A prayer of thanksgiving

We give you thanks, wonderful God, for the gift of life, for the opportunities of life, for the invitations to flourish in life. May we be as whole-hearted as you in all we do, as generous as you in all we give, as daring as you in all we dream, and as faithful as you in all our relationships. Thank you for everything. **Amen.**

## Gospel Reading | 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 butchered, 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, mistreated 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.”

## Reflection | A wholehearted response to God’s invitation

There was once a woman who was a princess in Nigeria. She married a teacher from Ireland, and they moved there and had three daughters. They were not wealthy and her husband died before the last of their daughters was married, but the woman was determined to give all of them, including the youngest, a wedding befitting their status as belonging to a royal line. No expense was spared. Each wedding, and particularly the receptions afterwards, was lavish. Everyone from her acquaintance was invited, or at least as many as the venues could contain. The bride’s dresses were stunning, but as well as supplying the bride’s dresses, for the Nigerian contingent, men and women, she supplied bolts of matching brightly coloured batik fabric to fashion into wedding clothes. Is this similar to the tradition in this week’s Gospel story when the wedding guest is shockingly ejected for not wearing the right clothes?

Every culture has its own traditions around weddings. Where in the UK we have wedding receptions, in the US they frequently have a ‘rehearsal dinner’ and a ‘wedding breakfast’. In India and other places the celebrations can go on for days. But more and more nowadays we see that in

our culture we are combining different traditions from around the world. Ben and I for instance did have a wedding rehearsal bring a share meal at church after our rehearsal the night before the wedding, and I'm glad we did as we were very ready for something to eat! It was a nice way to say 'thank you' to all those who were giving of their time to play a part in our service – including 3 ministers, a choir, groomsmen, best men and more!

We may not understand all of the allusions in Jesus' story, particularly as it turns from a seemingly happy story of a royal wedding to one of war, murder and mayhem, but key to it is the idea of who is invited and who accepts. There are no moral criteria; both 'good and bad' are, in the end, invited in. No one earns their right to be there. Then, perhaps, we remember that this is not really a story about wedding customs, it is about the kingdom of God.

And then we read the sting in tail: one person is ejected. Everyone is invited; but there is more than one way of not accepting the invitation.

In this parable from Matthew's gospel, as in the preceding two, Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders. This wedding banquet story follows immediately on the tail of his direct comment that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to those who produce kingdom fruits (21:43). Jesus' earlier comment is illustrated as those who have been invited to the wedding banquet refuse to come, and the king throws open the invitation to all. The people of God were set apart by God, a chosen people, not in the sense of being elite, but rather chosen to show God to the other nations. Having failed to take this seriously, they have lost their status.

There are some stark images in this story. The invited guests do not merely fail to show up: they refuse, they insult, they kill the messengers. The king does not merely feel anger: there is a severe consequence. Those who are invited instead do not fall into certain categories; everyone is invited, good and bad. As an image of the kingdom of heaven, God is generous and our response matters.

The custom was for the host – in this case the king – to provide wedding robes for the guests. All guests were dressed similarly, so role and status were irrelevant. The guest in the parable who has continued to wear his own clothes wasn't wholehearted in his acceptance. He has not joined in with the necessary preparation for the banquet. He has stood apart, attending on his own terms and this, too, has a severe consequence. The symbolism here is that of clothing representing one's spiritual state (see, for example, Romans 13:12, Galatians 3:27). All are welcome in the kingdom of heaven, but a wholehearted acceptance of God's invitation is needed.

### **Hymn | StF 255 The kingdom of God is justice and joy**

The kingdom of God  
is justice and joy,  
for Jesus restores  
what sin would destroy.  
God's power and glory  
in Jesus we know;  
and here and hereafter  
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God  
is mercy and grace;  
the captives are freed,  
the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed  
God's banquet to share,  
and hope is awakened  
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God  
is challenge and choice:  
believe the good news,  
repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners  
brought Christ to his cross:  
our crisis of judgement  
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,  
the gift and the goal;  
in Jesus begun,  
in heaven made whole.  
The heirs of the kingdom  
shall answer his call,  
and all things cry glory  
to God all in all.

## **Prayers of intercession**

Living God, your Son lived among the people of the Holy Land and mixed with both Jews and Gentiles. Your banquet is a feast for all to share in harmony and peace. We pray for those whose lives are shattered by warfare and conflict. We hold before you Israelis and Palestinians, Russians and Ukrainians and all who live in fear of the bullet and the bomb.

God who offers peace to those who will receive it,  
**May all people say yes and accept your love**

You invite leaders and outcasts; those with plenty and those with nothing; lawmakers and lawbreakers. We hold before you the leaders of all the nations of the world. They desire the best for their people; help them to see the needs of their neighbours as well. May all rejoice in the diversity of humanity and co-exist without violence and oppression.

God who offers peace to those who will receive it,  
**May all people say yes and accept your love**

In your banquet there is food for the needy. You welcome the hungry, the homeless and those who have fled their lands in fear to seek refuge in a strange country. In you there are no barriers of language or background; of gender or age; of employment or unemployment. Your welcome is fulsome; your invitation is to all. We hold before you those who feel excluded for whatever reason. May we see your image in all our neighbours and show the love we have received.

God who offers peace to those who will receive it,  
**May all people say yes and accept your love**

God of comfort and healing, you invite the sick and sorrowful as well as the healthy and happy to your great feast. For many, this is not a time for celebration. Many grieve for loved ones – those who have died recently or for whom this is a time of anniversary. Many are worried as they wait for medical appointments, test results or treatment. Many are in pain and their loved ones sit beside them feeling helpless. We hold before you our health service and pray for all involved in it - doctors, nurses, administrators, managers, porters, health care assistants. We commend to you all who are sick and sorrowful naming in our hearts, especially those we know....

God who offers peace to those who will receive it,  
**May all people say yes and accept your love**

God of the Great Banquet, we stand in amazement, holding an invitation with our name on it! We will be welcomed and accepted. We will receive healing and peace. We will be fed and treated as your special guests. We stand before you in wonder at the height, depth, breadth and length of your love. We celebrate your presence.

God who offers peace to those who will receive it,  
**May all people say yes and accept your love**

As we say yes to you,  
we hear you say a resounding "yes!" to us  
and in that we rejoice.  
In Jesus' name.

**Amen**

## Hymn | StF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live.

A place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace.

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true.

Where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace.

Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

*All are welcome...*

Let us build a house where love is found,  
in water, wine and wheat.

A banquet hall on holy ground,  
where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space,

as we share in Christ the feast that frees us;

*All are welcome...*

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone.

To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger bear  
the image of God's face.

Let us bring an end to fear and danger;

*All are welcome...*

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard.

And loved and treasured, taught and  
claimed as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace.

Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter;

*All are welcome...*

## A sending out prayer

Go into the week ahead, and wherever you find yourself,  
celebrating or sharing a sadness, or anything in between,  
may you rejoice in God's grace.

See each moment as an invitation to meet with God,  
each meeting as an opportunity to invite others.

Until we meet again. **Amen.**