

Sermon Second after Trinity

Dear Bishop Ian, Revd Fathers and brothers and sisters in Christ, I wish you all well at this difficult time and hope that those of you who have managed to meet family again after a long spell have managed to do so. The impact of this period has affected us all and the mental stress on our children should not be minimised.

The Gospel reading allocated this Sunday, the second after Trinity, is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke, Chapter 14 and has been called the Parable of the Great Banquet. You will all be familiar with the parable I am sure.

A man had planned a large feast and invited many to attend, urging them to come as the meal was prepared and ready to be served. But to the man's surprise and annoyance he received one refusal after another—one person had just purchased a piece of land and had to go and see it; another had bought some oxen and was ready to go and try them out; and another had just been married and said that he was therefore not available to attend.

The host of the banquet was very angry at these responses and to be honest who could blame him? He instructed his servants to forget the list he had prepared but to search the back streets and alleyways to invite those who were poor, crippled, blind, and lame, the downtrodden in society—so the master of the house filled his dining hall with all who would come and who would appreciate the feast.

As a parable, the story is on two levels—as a story pure and simple, but also on a deeper level there is a message which represents the Kingdom of God. The invitation to the banquet is an invitation to enter God's Kingdom by the master of the house, who "represents" God for this purpose.

The initial invitees are the Jewish people of Jesus' time who rejected the invitation to taste of the heavenly banquet. When the broader invitation was given out this could be taken as a rebuff to the Pharisees who considered the poorer people unclean and unworthy of such an invitation.

Jesus however opened up the invitation to share in His Kingdom to everyone, irrespective of wealth or status. They just needed to have faith in His message.

The excuses given by the early guests for not attending the banquet are feeble—who would buy a piece of land or an oxen without having seen it first before purchase? Would a newly married couple turn down an invitation to join in a feast of celebration? Probably not. Because these people did not attend then the master determined that they would miss out permanently.

The Jews of Jesus' day rejected His invitation to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand and so those who listened to the message and accepted the faith would enter the Kingdom—those who did not would not be free to enter. We have a choice, but making the wrong choice means missing out on the heavenly banquet.

Much has been made during the lockdown of people taking stock of nature and religion with tangible benefits to themselves in terms of physical, mental, and spiritual health. There have also been several instances of breaches of "distancing" advice and putting others at risk by not listening to the advice given. People have decided that their own immediate circumstances and enjoyment is more important than the health of others or even themselves.

In today's society people in some ways are not greatly different to Jewish times. There are opportunities now at this unusual period in society, without major distractions in life, to

strengthen our faith, but when times change people tend to regress to their previous regimes and habits.

Jesus could not have provided a stronger message to the Jewish people in the Parable of the Great Banquet, but people then as now wanted to continue in their own furrow without thinking deeply enough of the consequences for tomorrow. As people of faith let us continue to strive for that heavenly banquet that is available to us and not reject it for the sake of an easy life! Amen

Dean Brian Roberts