

<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>11 October 2020</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost</b>
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Exodus 32. 1-14	The golden calf
Psalm 106. 1-6, 20-24	The sins of Israel
Philippians 4	Final exhortations
Matthew 22. 1-14	The wedding banquet

*Open our minds, O Lord, to hear  
and to understand your Word, and  
open our hearts to do your will.  
We ask in Jesus' name. AMEN.*

Recently TV has shown more than the usual number of documentaries about the Royal family – about their place in a changing world, about Royal personalities and family disputes, and about royal palaces and castles, and royal diamonds and royal dresses, even royal hats.

Several of these programs have included scenes of State banquets at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, and have told us about some of those who were there and some who weren't.

The State banquet for President Trump last year was an especially great event – members of the Royal family were paired with members of the Trump family, the outgoing prime minister was invited and so were three of the favourites to succeed her, (good politics); Harry and Meghan were invited but declined, and the Leader of the Opposition and the Lord Mayor of London were not invited, because they had made public statements which were critical of Donald Trump. (Awkward conversations avoided).

Those who miss out on Royal banquets generally miss a good spread. I've included the menu for Donald Trump's banquet in today's *Connections*, with a translation from the French. It may help you prepare for your next dinner party.

We can compare these stories with today's Gospel parable of the heavenly banquet, to which all are invited. Many will decline the invitation, and some will come unprepared, so they will be denied entry. *For many are called but few are chosen.* This is a reference to a verse from a late Jewish Scripture, which is not in our Bibles but would have been well-known to Jesus' hearers: *For many have been created, but only a few will be saved.* (2 Esdras 8.3)

Whether it's a baptism or a wedding or a consecration or a coronation or any great event, appropriate dressing-up is a sign that the wearer recognises the significance of the occasion.

Today's story has a similar message to the story of the wicked tenants we read last week, it even includes an almost identical verse – *they seized his slaves, maltreated them and killed them.* (v. 5-6 cf ch.21.35) When the Gospels were being compiled, during times of intermittent persecution, this was happening every day, Jesus' apostles and evangelists were being beaten and jailed and

killed. This is still happening today in various parts of the world, in various ways. The Gospels are always relevant.

In the Middle East wedding feasts are the most joyous and significant of all family and community events. The bride is changing families, moving from her parents' extended family into her husband's extended family. The celebrations may last all day and all night, perhaps several days and nights. Even the poorest families will make sure that at least immediate family members are dressed up for the occasion -- in traditional, lavish, expensive, long wedding robes which may be handed down from generation to generation.

So the wedding feast becomes a marvellous metaphor for the salvation experience, and even for the end of time, when we shall celebrate the second coming of the Son, in power and glory. We are told that Jesus performed his first miracle at a village wedding feast.

When the Gospels were being compiled, late in the first century and early in the second, this parable was included because early Christians could identify all the people in the story --

- The king is God.
- The son is Jesus.
- The invited guests are the people of Israel.
- The first slaves are the Hebrew prophets.
- The second and third sets of slaves are the Christian apostles and evangelists
- The burned city is Jerusalem.
- The good and bad guests are the members of the church, which includes both the righteous and unrighteous. Jesus' hearers were shocked when he invited social outcasts to be part of his family—widows, prostitutes, tax collectors. Some of the first Jewish Christians found it hard to accept that Gentile converts had the same divine rights as Jewish converts.
- finally, the wedding robe equates to a righteous life – as Jesus' brother James reminds us, *faith without works is dead*. Those who spend their lives worshipping the golden calf – money or sport or worldly fame, have shut themselves out of the wedding banquet.

We might identify some of the people in the story differently today, but Jesus still brings a royal invitation to all people, even those whom some other people see as their inferiors.

Gentiles outnumber Jews among the faithful; there are more Anglicans in Nigeria, among the natives, as the missionaries called them, than there are in Britain; there are more than twice as many Catholics in the Philippines than in Spain, yet Spanish missionaries often forced the natives to stand outside the church, in covered porches on each side of the nave. I have seen them on my travels. Now, some so-called third world countries are sending missionaries to Western Europe.

We can see ourselves in this story in multiple ways – the story can be an allegory of our new life in Christ: we have responded to Jesus' invitation and become part of Jesus' family. The story can also be an allegory of our future, of our entry to eternal life.

I enjoy some of the great stories about the Reverend Ian Paisley, the fiery Irish cleric and politician who became one of the architects of the peace agreement in Northern Ireland. He was preaching on this passage one Sunday, telling his people it was an allegory of the End Times, of the Day of Judgement. The congregation grew restive; as he reached the climax of his sermon, he repeated, "on the Day of Judgement there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth". An old woman called out, "Dr. Paisley, but I have no teeth". Paisley roared back, "Madam, teeth will be provided".

When Marty and I went to see Judith Hague in hospital a few months ago, we were very moved when she told us she was looking forward to her 'change of address'. We felt this was such a positive way of looking beyond earthly death to eternal life. Just as the bride leaves her extended family to join that of her husband after the wedding feast, so death can take us from our earthly families and friends into the Father's heavenly family.

This is why Christian funerals have a dual emphasis – families are feeling distraught, friends are upset, work colleagues are distressed -- they have lost someone who was an important part of their lives, someone they cared deeply for. So the eulogies will honour their life.

But if that person has accepted Christ into their life they have gone to be with him in death. A good reason to be happy. For many people, death may be a welcome release from long-drawn-out end-of-life pain and humiliation. A second reason to be happy.

So the prayers and readings and the minister's address will comfort the mourners by reminding them of the promise of pain-free eternal life -- *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me, in my Father's house there are many dwelling places, I go to prepare a place for you.* (John 14.1-2)

When David Warner was helping me prepare to conduct my first funeral a few years ago, he kept reminding me, *You are there for the living, not for the dead.*

We have had a sad few months of people leaving St Mark's family to go to their heavenly dwelling places, but leaving good memories --- we are constantly reminded that Rob Taylor worked on our kitchen and on our back deck; one of Marlene Mylechrane's paintings hangs in our hallway; one time, when John Lucke had to work, Shirley asked me to escort her to the annual Guide Dogs graduation; the chair embarrassed us by introducing me as 'Mr Lucke'. It was an honour. People we love may die, but they never really leave us, until our own deaths.

Charles Wesley wrote hundreds of hymns, but many of them are rarely sung today, including the one I've included in my own funeral plan. It's upbeat. It begins:

*Rejoice for a brother deceased;*

*Our loss is his infinite gain;*

*A soul out of prison released,*

*And freed from its bodily pain!*

Wesley's hymn was written centuries before we had effective palliative care, centuries before morphine, even longer before Panadol. Old age was often truly painful. The words of the hymn sum up the Christian understanding of death. As St Paul taught, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Phil.1.21). We often don't see death that way, especially if the brother or sister deceased is young, or has died in an accident.

Today's Gospel is Jesus' reminder that our God is the God of the living, not of the dead. We'll have another reminder next week, when we read the second part of this chapter of the gospel. In the meantime, Sunday by Sunday, the liturgy of the Eucharist proclaims the love of Christ, and the life of Christ, and the death and resurrection of Christ. The eucharist is a memorial of Jesus' last supper. For us, it is also a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

*Lord God, our Father and our King, we praise you that you opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, help us to be worthy of a place at your heavenly banquet. In the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus. AMEN.*

for *Connections*

**Today's gospel: Matthew 22.1-14**

Menu at the State banquet for Donald Trump  
Buckingham Palace, June 2019



**First course:**

Délice de Flétan en Vapeur (Steamed Halibut Fillet)

Mousseline de Cresson Velouté au Cerfeuil (Watercress Mousse with Parsley)

**Main course:**

Selle d'Agneau de Windsor Farcie Marigny (Saddle of Windsor Farcie Marigny lamb)

Timbale de Carottes à l'Estragon (Carrot and Tarragon Timbale\*)

Panaché de Légumes d'Eté (Selection of Summer Vegetables)

Pommes Elizabeth (Elizabeth-style potatoes)

Salade (Salad)

**Pudding:**

Tarte Sablée Breton\*\* aux Fraises (Strawberry tart on a Breton shortbread-style base)

Crème à la Verveine (Verbena Cream\*\*\*)

\*Timbale refers to the shape of the food. \*\* Sablée Breton is a buttery French cookie.

\*\*\* Verbena Cream is cream infused with sugar and Verbena lemons.

After pudding, the servers brought out fresh fruit, coffee, and petit fours.