

A sermon given at St. Michael and All Angels' Church, Sandhurst on 25th June 2017 for Choral Evensong.

Luke 14:12-24, 1 Samuel 24:1-17 and Psalm 46

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I wonder what you thought of our gospel passage tonight? Were you confused about how it started? If you were, I am not surprised as our reading started part way through a parable on humility before moving onto the Parable of the Great Feast.

So let me start by setting the scene a bit for you, at the start of Chapter 14, we are told that Jesus is at the house of a leader of the Pharisees and is there for a meal on the Sabbath. At this meal are other Pharisees and lawyers. While a lot of the Pharisees were against Jesus, not all of them were.

The Pharisees were experts in knowing the Jewish scriptures, and this gives another dimension to the setting of this parable as throughout the Old Testament, there are references to what is often referred to as the Messianic Banquet, where God will welcome everyone who believes to an impressively rich banquet. However, the tradition implies that it is only Good Jewish people who will be welcomed into this banquet and the Pharisees will certainly have believed that they were entitled to be at this banquet.

It is in this scene that Jesus set's his parables.

The two parables at the start of chapter 14 of St. Luke's gospel are both about guests at a banquet, and Jesus wanted to talk to people about how God sees them.

The host in the parable is God, In the second parable, God was understandable angry with those who had originally been invited and then came up with the most lame excuses imaginable, can you imagine buying a piece of land without seeing it first? So giving that as an excuse made the person look foolish and in addition it insulted God as it said that their plans were more important than God.

The host decided that if those invited were not going to come, then he would invite those in the town to come, the people who were in the town, those who would not normally have been welcomed into your home, they would have made their living by begging as we know that the host describes them as the crippled and lame, in society at that time, they would not have been able to have another role. There was no social services to fall back on, integration hadn't been heard thought of yet. As they were in the town they would have been used to having interaction with different people and would have

experienced a wide variety of interactions with them, not all of them kind and compassionate.

The people who were in the country lanes were outcasts of society, so outcast that they would not even be welcomed into the town to beg, it is for this reason that Jesus uses the word to compel. They would not have thought themselves worthy, so they would have needed a lot of compassion and love to convince them that they would be welcomed, they would be no hidden agenda, they were valued for they were, as a child of God, as our brother and sister.

While we may think that there are several differences between society in Jesus' time and our society now, the comparisons are still there, there are the groups of people in our society who are "just like us" with homes, a job, family and friends; however there are also other groups in our society, groups who are struggling financially and worrying about how they will continue to pay the mortgage or rent, those who are facing redundancy, those who are reliant on foodbank vouchers just to feed their family, those whose family life is under strain, those who are suffering from abuse, or addictions to alcohol or gambling. Then there is another part of society, those that society seem to shun and push away, the travellers, and to some extent the immigrants, those who are not made to feel welcome.

The banquet that God hosted, ended up being filled, not with those who felt they were entitled to come, but those who were on the margins of society and those whom society had made outcasts,

One of the clear messages from this parable is that God wants everyone, whoever they are, wherever they come from, traveller, immigrant, homosexual, straight, rich, poor, married, single at his banquet in heaven, all anyone needs to do is to come to God and they will be welcomed,

A powerful message, that whoever anyone is, if we all just come and encourage and support others to come to God they will be welcomed by God.

This is the wonderful message of Grace that God gives to each of us, we are all welcomed and valued and have a place at His table.

If God wants everyone to be welcomed, encouraged and invited into his rich reward in heaven, what does this mean for us as Christians and as a church? Do we go out of the way to encourage and welcome everyone in society or do we keep in our comfort zone and only associate with people like us?

As we sit, let us pray.