

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Last week Scott talked about the gospel reading where Jesus was criticised for healing a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. The Synagogue leader was horrified that Jesus was healing on the Sabbath but Jesus was very clear that you wouldn't abandon an animal on the Sabbath if it needed rescuing so why would you abandon a person. And actually we should be worshipping for 7 whole days not 1 in 7. The leaders were upset because they had been humiliated in front of others, but the crowds were delighted!

And so today's gospel takes us further on the long road to the cross where Jesus is being closely and suspiciously watched by the leaders to see what he was going to do next. Jesus was this time going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to have a meal. Jesus saw how the guests were jostling with each other to try and get what they considered to be the best seats.

And so Jesus told them a parable – the shortened version of which is – “if you are invited to a wedding banquet don't automatically assume that you are to sit at the best place. It may well be that someone else perhaps more distinguished has been invited and your host will ask you to move down the table! And when you hold a dinner party or feast don't do so with the hope or assumption that you will be invited back. Rather do it for those who would not necessarily be able to repay the hospitality....for in doing so you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”.

Jesus ate with many people – he ate with tax collectors (Levi), with Mary and Martha, the disciples, Pharisees etc He used his time with each of the different groups to teach and to discuss and to learn.

On the face of it our gospel reading today looks like a lesson in table manners and seating etiquette, and in truth on that level – they are wise words. For indeed often as a society we could at times be accused of idolising the famous or the seemingly great or good. And so to save ourselves embarrassment these are good rules to follow. However, as ever, I guess it's more than that.

The thing is that when Jesus talked about banquets and feasts he often used them as a metaphor for talking about the Kingdom of God. Tom Wright, a previous Bishop of Durham and currently amongst other things lecturer at St Andrew's University says that the kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven is already here and now. But that our job here on earth is to work towards bringing that into perfection. To work towards a world where love rules.

Right now, the world feels a particularly unsettled and vulnerable place – politically, economically, socially, health-wise etc. The impending Brexit brings its own unique uncertainties, and the predictions are that the vulnerable are likely to be most at risk. Many of our Bishops (including our own Bishop Nick) have written a public letter asking politicians to seriously consider the implications of a no-deal Brexit. Regardless of our own political thoughts, the letter states that Churches serve communities of every shape, size and complexion. We continue to serve, regardless of political persuasion. And rightly so. As our reading from Hebrews states – “Let mutual love continue”.

So this feast, this banquet, this party – we are all invited to join in – we are all called to come to the Lord's table and join in the feasts regardless of status, regardless of profile, of importance – we are all invited because we are known and loved by God. God wishes to welcome each of us to the table and the feast as equals in his sight – flawed, imperfect, but deeply

deeply loved. He wants to welcome us with open arms and endless love. We are all invited to feast at both the earthly and heavenly banquets.

So what are we to do with the invitation? Well, if we choose to say yes to God and to come to this table we will be fed and nourished.

We will be fed and nourished with God's love and grace and forgiveness and joy and strengthened.

Strengthened to leave these walls here and to go out and face the world.

Strengthened to face the world and all that lies out there.

Strengthened to face all that the world and life throws at us – the good and the not so good, the joyful times and the times of great vulnerability and sorrow.

Strengthened to try as best we can to take as much love and energy as we can out in to our communities, to be people of hope and love, people of comfort and prayer.

Strengthened to carry out God's mission of love to all people whoever they are.

People who are who don't feel the need to sit at the most important places, and people of humility.

People who welcome and embrace others just as God does – as equals in his sight – flawed and imperfect but loved deeply.

People who will to the best of our abilities will play our part in building God's kingdom here on earth.

And it is on that basis that suddenly the world feels perhaps a more hopeful place.

There are always some who do not feel able to come to the table – my mum attended church every week all her life – the Church of Scotland church she went to with my dad celebrated communion about once a quarter – and for as long as I can remember she would never take communion. If challenged – she told us she wasn't good enough.

The thing is – none of us are good enough. But God's grace and forgiveness and mercy is such that he knows that and love us so much that he wants to give us everything.

There is always room at the feast, there is always room at the table, there is always room in our hearts and the table, the feast and the kingdom of heaven is overflowing with love and mercy, with endless hospitality and grace and love. As Hebrews says – let mutual love continue – do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels in disguise.

There are some words from the Iona Community which may be helpful –

*We are here because Jesus has called us – strangers and friends, locals and visitors, the certain and the curious.*

*It is always a mixed company Jesus gathers and invites to his table where in bread and wine he meets us, and through him we, who are different, are joined to each other.*

*So come, not because you understand but because you are understood. Come, not because of how you feel but because God has food for you.*

*Come, not because you deserve a place but because Jesus invites you just as you are.*

As we leave here today having been blessed, fed and nourished may we then go out and share in the God's radical and revolutionary love for all.

Amen