

This short act of worship has been produced for you by
the Revd Dr Valentin Dedji.

If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few
moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would
normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as
they pray for you.

I warmly greet you in the name of God the Father, God the Son
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen!

The God that we serve is like a generous host who, consistently
open wide his arms, inviting all his children without distinction
to all sorts of heavenly banquets. Today, we'll explore Jesus'
parable of an Invitation to a wedding. The question is: Will all
invited respond to the divine invitation?

For now, whoever you are, Angels in Heavens would rejoice if
you could willingly join us for this act of worship.

CALL 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.
(Taken from StF 24)

HYMN Singing the Faith 55 Immortal, Invisible, God only wise

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA>

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty,
victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might -
thy justice like mountains high soaring above thy clouds which
are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render: O help us to see
tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty,
victorious, thy great name we praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Loving God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we thank you that as light breaks forth, you allow us, in your Grace to see again the wonder of all what you have made.

So, Lord of all, Lord of our life, Lord of Creation, as we come into your presence at this very moment, in an age of change and doubt, keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out.

Through your amazing Grace, we are no more outcasts, no more strangers, all dividing walls are down.

Here in your presence is love that redefines us, dignifies the least and lowest one. We who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND REPENTENCE

Lord Jesus, I have come to wash my soul in the living water, wash my heart in your cleansing stream.

Here is mercy and forgiveness; I shall be clean again.

I have come to bathe my eyes in your word, Lord Jesus, cleanse my thoughts and my imaginings. May these eyes see as your love sees. May your light and Holy Spirit flood my being.

For I've been bought with the blood of Jesus, now my life is not my own. A temple holy, for you only where you are loved and known. **Amen!**

WORD OF FORGIVENESS

As our Lord Jesus has always told those who humbly repented before him: 'My son, my daughter, your sins are forgiven. Stand up and go! Go! Sin no more and start a new life.' **Amen!**

BIBLE READING

Matthew 22: 1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

REFLECTION

For few weeks now, we have been exploring a number of parables by Jesus. Jesus had great story-telling skills. When it comes to teach complex spiritual messages with prophetic meaning, Jesus always preferred parables. In our Bible passage that we have just read Jesus told what is known as the ‘Parable of the Heavenly Wedding Banquet.’ In interpreting a parable, the context is very important.

The wedding banquet was one of the most joyous occasions in Jewish life and could last for up to a week. In His parable, Jesus compares heaven to a wedding banquet that a king had prepared for his son (Matthew 22:2).

The king is God the Father, and the son who is being honoured at the banquet is Jesus Christ, who “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11). Israel held the invitation to the kingdom, but when the time actually came

for the kingdom to appear (see Matthew 3:1), they refused to believe it. Many prophets, including John the Baptist, had been murdered.

It is important to note here that it is not because the invited guests *could not* come to the wedding feast, but it was because they *would not* come (see Luke 13:34). Everyone had an excuse. How tragic, and how indicative of human nature, to be offered the blessings of God and to refuse them because of the draw of mundane things!

As a consequence of this refusal, the wedding invitation is extended to anyone and everyone, total strangers, both good and bad. This refers to the gospel being taken to the Gentiles. When we talk about gentiles that means anyone who is not Jew by birth; that’s certainly me; that’s probably you! That means that the gospel message that Jesus taught, would be made available to everyone.

The matter of the wedding garment is instructive. It would be a gross insult to the king to refuse to wear the garment provided to the guests. The man who was caught wearing his old clothing learned what an offense it was as he was removed from the celebration.

Just as the king provided wedding garments for his guests, God provides salvation for humankind. Our wedding garment is the

righteousness of Christ, and unless we have it, we will miss the wedding feast. When the religions of the world are stripped down to their basic tenets, we either find people struggling as they try to find their own way toward God, or we find the cross of Christ on which all has been accomplished for us.

CONCLUSION

May I suggest 3 key lessons for us to take from this passage:

- Our Calling: ***'For God so loved the world that He sent His begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life.'*** (John3: 16). Whatever stage we are, on our spiritual journey, whatever the shadows of our past, whatever the doubt about our present and whatever the uncertainty about our future, God loves people like us. God is interested in us. He reserves his invitation for us at the Heavenly Banquet. Jesus is telling you right now: *'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.'* (Rev. 30:20). The question is: Are we ready to respond to the divine invitation?
- Our Faithfulness: I guess that you have probably already said yes to God's calling for you. Or, you are getting ready to do so. The crucial point here is how faithful we remain regarding our calling. Let our yes be yes indeed.

This is where obedience comes in. So we need to ask: Am I building my life faithfully and obediently aligned with Christ, Our Cornerstone? – is all of my life faithfully and obediently aligned and built on Him – or do I “do my own thing?” That's the crucial and personal question that each one of us needs to ask. It is on purpose that I have chosen as the closing hymn for this short act of worship a well-known classic hymn with the chorus that goes like this: ***'Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.'***

- Our Perseverance: The Christian life is often compared to a marathon, not to a sprint. It is only when we persevere against mundane distractions that we can freely accept and dedicate ourselves to our divine calling. This can happen through prayers with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that there is a big blessing in achieving such a life purpose. As Jesus himself promised: ***'Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'*** May we have the privilege to receive such abundant words of blessings for God's Glory. Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

O Heavenly Father, we lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet, haunted by hunger, war and fear, oppressed by power and hate.

We pray that you may give your wisdom to all of us, in today's world where human life seems less than profit, might, and pride.

Lord Jesus, we bring our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised; you show us how old pain and wounds can be used to foster a new community life.

We bring Lord our broken selves, especially in these strange times of the Covid19 pandemic as many are bereaved, confused, anxious, tired, lonely and depressed.

May you inspire us Lord and restore your people through your gift of healing grace and reawaken our purpose in life.

Come Spirit, on us breathe, with life and strength anew; find in us love, and hope and trust, and lift us up to you.

Above all, Holy Spirit teach us, not only how to respond to your calling, but also how to trust and obey you in all our daily activities.

Through Jesus our Lord and Saviour we pray. Amen!

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen**

HYMN: Hymns & Psalms 687 When we walk with the Lord

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcMQ0RiQrtE>

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of his word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,
But our toil he doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss,
Not a frown nor a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

But we never can prove
the delights of his love
until all on the altar we lay;
for the favour he shows,
for the joy he bestows,
are for them who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at his feet,
Or we'll walk by his side in the way;
What he says we will do,
Where he sends we will go
Never fear, only trust and obey:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

John Henry Sammis (1846-1919)

BLESSING

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to
you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

AMEN!

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