

Orphir & Stenness Church
Communion Service, Sunday 15th October 2023; Prop. 23A
Transcript

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. Welcome to our worship.
Wherever you have come from today,
whether you come here regularly, or occasionally,
your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Today we find Jesus telling a parable about a wedding banquet, and invited guests who find excuses not to come, and we join in celebrating Holy Communion. I would like you to join in special parts of the service, and these are printed on the Link.

As we begin our service, let us take a few moments to feel the worries and stress of the last week slip away, and open ourselves to the presence of God among us.

Gathering prayer:

Lord, as we come to worship, and as we come to your Table,
help us to see ourselves as we are, and to come in humility.
We come in peace, maybe even in pieces, in hope, or perhaps in hopelessness,
weak without your power; lost without your guidance; nothing without you.
But with you all things are possible. Amen.

Call to Worship

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Let us worship God: Let's sing that favourite Psalm:

Hymn: 15 (Tune Orlington): The Lord's my Shepherd

Prayer:

Let us pray:

The whole earth belongs to God; the beauty of it, the mystery of it;
and we have been called to share in all its fulness,
to share in the banquet, and in the fulness of life itself,
through his love, shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Within this familiar place the wind of the Spirit whispers down through time,
and it is good to be here, for heaven is here, and earth,
and the space is thin between them.

Distance may divide, but Christ's promise unites those bounded by time,
those blessed by eternity.
Let heaven be glad; Let the whole earth cry glory.

We give thanks for all we have experienced of the world, today, and in the last weeks;

for all that we have experienced of God's loving care,
for all that has come to us through human relationships and friendship,
and above all, for all that we have seen and heard and tasted and handled of the word of life.
For faith renewed that Jesus Christ is Lord, for every glimpse of reality, we give thanks.

We acknowledge with regret times when our vision has been blurred and unfocussed;
when we have been hard of hearing, where we have side-stepped decisions,
turned aside from the way that we knew we were to take.

Yet, confident of the renewing grace of our God, we ask that he will set our feet again upon
the way, give all of us a new beginning, a new momentum,
and a new desire and readiness to follow Jesus Christ wherever he may lead;
and all this for his sake. Amen

Reading: Peter will read for us today:

Matthew 22:1-14 (*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*)

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 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." But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." 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.

'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. 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." For many are called, but few are chosen.' Amen.

Thank you

Hymn 694 Brother, Sister, Let me serve you

Message:

This parable in Matthew's Gospel is a strange story. Luke gives a more straightforward version of the same story, about how the people originally invited fail to realize the value of the invitation to the banquet. Matthew's story is urgent and angry: the banquet is completely ready, about to go to waste. In his version the messengers are mistreated, and the meal is held up while the King takes time out to call out the army, kill these invited guests, and burn their city: a disturbing story, with no assurance of a happy ending even for those who have made it to the banquet. What's going on?

A bit of background about Jewish customs. When the invitations to a special event, like a wedding feast, were sent out, the time was not stated. When everything was ready, servants were sent out with a final summons to tell the guests to come. So, the king in this parable had sent out his invitations a while back; but only when everything was ready was the final summons issued--and insultingly refused.

Most commentators believe that verse 7 about sending an army to kill the murderers and burn down their city is an addition by Matthew, who was writing his Gospel sometime between AD 80-90, and refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70.

This parable has two meanings.

The King is throwing a glorious, spectacular wedding party for his son, an occasion for rejoicing. Twice the King says that everything is ready. It will not keep. It's now or never. Most folk would jump at the chance to go, but these guests don't seem to be fussed about the invitation at all, treat it as a nuisance, and even beat up the postie who brings the card. The King is furious, and what was an occasion for national rejoicing turns into a war. Surely these people realise that it's the King's Son - maybe the next King - who is being married? What are they playing at? They might never get another chance to go to a royal wedding. They don't seem to want to share in the celebrations. The Son doesn't seem to matter. Some of them go off, quite honestly, to their farms and their businesses. They have work to do. The Son won't help them with that, won't bring in their wages. They reject the Son - and reject also their share in the future of the nation.

What's this all about?

The invited guests who refused to come, stand for the Jews. Ages ago, God had invited the Jews to be his chosen people; yet when God sent his Son into the world, and they were called to follow him, they contemptuously refused. The result was that God's invitation went out direct to all the people in the highways and the byways, who stand for the sinners and the outsiders, Gentiles, who never expected an invitation into the Kingdom.

Jesus warns the Jewish religious establishment that they have abused their privileged status. Many of the Pharisees had become bogged down in the details of their religious observances, so obsessed by ritual purity and rigid obedience to rules and regulations, that they had lost sight of what it was all about. They have ignored the invitation - even beaten up the messengers - so the invitation is extended to everybody who will listen, including the poor and the outcast, to the Gentiles - outsiders - ultimately to ourselves. If the religious elite won't listen, then God will find others who will.

This was a warning to the Jews, and a warning to us as well.

If we're not careful, just like the Pharisees, we too can become so involved in maintaining this institution that we call the church that we lose sight of its purpose.

Through a series of parables, Jesus's warnings about ignoring the chance to share in the kingdom get more and more pointed, and it becomes clear that they are about Jesus himself, and about the Kingdom of God. If you reject one you reject the other.

It's clear that the Pharisees understand that the stories are directed at them. But they don't believe Jesus! *They* are the ones who understand their religious traditions better than anybody else. *They* are the ones who are authorised to interpret scripture. How dare this ordinary man take such liberties? How can their attitude to him have any bearing on what is to happen to them?

We have the benefit of hindsight. We know how the story turns out - but would we have done any differently from those who just carried on with their work? What would you have done?

Somewhere in here we have a reminder that the servants calling the invited guests are the preachers who have been abused, and whose message has been rejected by the Jewish

leaders. The guests brought in from the streets are the Gentiles. This story is about the Jewish rejection of the Christian messengers. A warning for us too.

What about this poor bloke without his good suit? Many answers have been given to that question, but it is helpful to know that, for Jesus's original listeners, this thought would be familiar through older Jewish parables about having good clothes fresh and ready when the summons came - about being prepared. Or about a king supplying special robes to his servants, for special occasions. The wise put theirs in the wardrobe and kept them good, while the foolish used theirs for everyday work and got them worn and soiled. The time came when the king demanded the robes back. The wise handed theirs back fresh and clean, whereas the foolish were thrown into prison, and their robes sent to the cleaners. This story tells us that we must hand our souls back to God as clean as we got them, and anyone who has nothing to return but a stained soul will be condemned.

Yet it's hard not to think that this chap got a raw deal.

He didn't know he was going to be invited. The servants were sent out into the streets to herd in everyone they could find, good and bad alike. He just came in with the crowd, looking for a free feed - didn't realise where he was, didn't realise he was celebrating the King's Son's wedding banquet. Suddenly, here comes the King. "*Why didn't you wear proper clothes for the wedding?*" He doesn't know what to say. Maybe he could have made excuses: didn't have time to change, didn't *have* a good suit. But he has no response. He loses his chance. Maybe he's just like all the others who turned down the invitation from the King: not interested in his relationship with the King, or his Son: didn't expect to meet him, doesn't care what the banquet is for.

The lesson here is that the door is open to everyone, but they must come with an attitude in keeping with the invitation.

Unless we come to rejoice with the Son, there is nothing for us either.

It's not about clothes. It's figurative - a warning that we need *to put on the garments of Christian commitment* and true discipleship, and to do the will of the Father in heaven.

The parable urges us to take a good hard look at ourselves.

There's a wider lesson too. If we go to a friend's house for a special occasion or a party, we don't usually go in dirty working clothes. We know fine that it's not our clothes that matter to our friend, and we don't need to dress up, but it's a matter of respect and common courtesy to our friend to dight the sharn aff oor buits an smarten ourselves up a bit.

The same thing applies when we go to what we call God's house - to the church.

But notice very carefully. This parable has nothing at all to do with the clothes we wear to go to church. Going to church must never be an excuse for a fashion parade, or showing off expensive clothes. No! It's all about the spirit in which we come to God's house. We *prepare to come* by putting on the garments of the mind and the heart and the soul; the garment of expectation, the garment of humility, the garment of penitence, the garment of faith, the garment of reverence. Without these garments we should not approach God. Without them we are saying that we don't want to stay at the party.

It's easy to come to church - to God's house - with no preparation at all. Sometimes church services begin with a few moments of quietness: an opportunity to stop, and to remember where we are, and why we have come. Maybe we should do that before we leave home. If every one of us can take a little time - a little thought, a little self-examination - a little prayer - then we can look for worship through which things happen in our souls, happen in the life of our church; happen in the affairs of the world.

Thoughts to bear in mind as we prepare to come to the Lords' Table.

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

During the next hymn please bring forward the Offering ...

Hymn 662 Jesus thou joy of loving hearts

Dedication of Offering

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God,
all things belong to you, and all that we have comes from you.
If we have gifts to bring, it is of your free goodness.
Accept these our offerings, and grant that they may be hallowed by your blessing,
and used in your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Statement of Christian Faith

I invite you to join me in declaring our faith in the Statement of Christian Faith authorised by the General Assembly in 1992.

We believe in one God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
God is love.

We praise God the Father:
who created the universe and keeps it in being.
He has made us his sons and daughters
to share his joy,
living together in justice and peace,
caring for his world and for each other.

We proclaim Jesus Christ, God the Son:
born of Mary,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
he became one of us, sharing our life and our death.
He made known God's compassion and mercy,
giving hope and declaring forgiveness of sin,
offering healing and wholeness to all.
By his death on the cross and by his resurrection,
he has triumphed over evil.
Jesus is Lord of life and of all creation.

We trust God the Holy Spirit:
who unites us to Christ
and gives life to the Church;
who brings us to repentance
and assures us of forgiveness.
The Spirit guides us
in our understanding of the Bible,
renews us in the sacraments,
and calls us to serve God in the world.

We rejoice in the gift of eternal life:
we have sure and certain hope of
resurrection through Christ,
and we look for his coming again
to judge the world.
Then all things will be made new;
and creation will rejoice
in worshiping the Father

through the Son
in the power of the Spirit
one God, blessed forever. Amen.

Something special: Peter McDonald wishes to join the church and the congregation. I think that, by habit and repute, Peter is already a member. He has already fulfilled all the requirements, but, for the avoidance of doubt, I invite Peter to reaffirm his faith. Peter, please come forward.

Peter, you have already joined with the congregation in the confession of faith. I now ask you to respond to the following questions:

Peter: Do you reaffirm your faith in one God, Creator, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you confess anew the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?

I do

Do you believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church?

I do

Do you promise to seek the peace and unity of this Church and to uphold its doctrine, worship, government and discipline?

I do

Thank you;

Peter ...

In the name of Jesus Christ the head of the Church, I formally confirm you as a member of this Congregation and Parish of the Church of Scotland, and thereby of the worldwide Christian Church, in token of which we give you the right hand of fellowship. May God grant you all grace.

Thank you Peter ...

And a little bird tells me that Maureen has just transferred her lines from a previous church to this one, so we welcome her as well.

The Story of the Last Supper:

On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating, he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words,

'This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

Later, he took a cup of wine, saying, 'This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my blood. Drink from it all of you to remember me.'

Sharing the Peace

This is a house of God. A place of peace.

A place where we befriend one another. I invite you to share the Peace of God with one another, by shaking hands or by making a sign of Peace. Before we come to the Lord's Table, let us put aside any feelings of animosity we have for anyone in the world. Blessed be Christ the Prince of Peace

The peace of Christ be with you all.

Invitation to Communion:

If, for any reason, you do not wish to receive the elements, please just decline, and remain united with us in prayer.

Invitation:

This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord himself.

So, come,

you who love the Lord a little and want to love him more;
you who have much faith and you who want to have it strengthened,
you who have been here often, and you who have not been for a long time;
you who have tried to follow, and you who have failed.

Come to this table to meet the living God,
love indescribable, and beyond our imagining, yet closer than our own breathing.
Come to this table to meet the risen Christ, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone,
God-with-us, embodied in our living.

The table is laid, and Christ is here, waiting for you to join him,
waiting to bless you as he has blessed his people across the ages.

This table is open to all, for it is the Lord's table.

You are all invited to be yourself, and know that *it is Jesus himself who invites you.*

Come and open your heart to the one who alone can meet its deepest needs.

Come and rejoice in all that he has done. Come.

Let us pray:

Loving God,

through your goodness, we have this bread and wine to offer,
which earth has given and human hands have made.

May we know your presence in the sharing of the bread,
so that we may know your touch in all bread, in all creation.

We celebrate the life that Jesus has shared among his community through the centuries,
and shares with us now.

Made one with Christ and with each other, we offer and present to you our very selves,
to be a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for your acceptance;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Taking of the Bread and Wine

As the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,

I take these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses to this holy
use and mystery. Amen,

*During the next hymn, individual pieces of bread and vials of wine will be distributed. Please
keep them, and at the appropriate time we will eat the bread together, then pause, and
afterwards drink the wine together.*

To take us into communion, let us sing:

Hymn: 557 O love that will not let me go

(elements distributed)

The Grace:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

As, before the meal, Jesus gave thanks and blessed, let us draw near to God and offer him
our prayers and thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you all.

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places,

to give you thanks and praise, holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God,
for the majesty of your glory, the wonder of your works, the riches of your grace.

Therefore, with your people of all places and times, and with the whole company of heaven,
we proclaim your greatness and sing your praise in the angels' song:
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

We bless you for his holy birth, his perfect life on earth,
for his suffering for us and his triumph over death; for his ascension to your right hand
and his gift of the Holy Spirit; and for the promise of his coming again.

Remembering his work and passion, and pleading his eternal sacrifice,
we follow his example and obey his command.
who on the night of his arrest took bread, and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said:
'This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me'.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said:
'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me'.

Send now your Holy Spirit to bless us and these your gifts of bread and wine,
that the bread which we break may be, for us, the communion of the body of Christ,
and the cup of blessing which we bless the communion of the blood of Christ;
that we, receiving them, by faith may be made partakers of his body and blood,
with all his benefits, to nourish us and help us grow in grace,
to the glory of your most holy name.

And here we offer and present to you our very selves,
to be a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for your acceptance;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

Remember, O Lord,
your holy Church throughout the world and reveal your glory among the nations,
that they may cease from war and work sincerely for peace.
Save your people, and bless those who belong to you,
shepherd them and carry them for ever.

Remember, O Lord, our families and friends, and surround them with your steadfast love.
Remember those who are sick; be close to all who suffer pain, or loneliness, or grief,
those who draw near to death, and those whom we name in our hearts before you.

Pause

Comfort them with your presence, sustain them by your promises, grant them your peace.

And now, rejoicing in the communion of the saints,
we remember with thanksgiving all your faithful servants
and those dear to us who serve you in the glory of heaven.
Keep us in unbroken fellowship with your whole Church in heaven and on earth,
and bring us at the last to the joy of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Breaking of Bread (BC03)

According to the holy institution, example, and command of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as a memorial of him, we do this:
who, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread,
and, when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
'This is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.'

Communion:

Take, eat. This is the body of Christ which is broken for you.
Do this, remembering him.

The body of Christ, given for you.

This cup is the new covenant sealed by Christ's blood
which was shed that the sins of many might be forgiven.
Drink from it, all of you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

The Peace

Many grains were gathered together to make this bread;
many grapes were mixed to make this wine;
so we who are many are one in Christ.
The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Prayer after Communion:

Let us pray:

Gracious God
we give you glory, thanks, and praise
for the dying and undying love of our Saviour Jesus Christ.
In your great goodness you have brought us into communion with him
and with all who love him, and made us heirs of your everlasting kingdom.
By your grace,
may we continue in holy fellowship, and live to the glory of your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Afterthought:

World Communion Sunday is celebrated by some Christian denominations on the first Sunday of every October (last Sunday) intended to promote Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation

Here is an excerpt from *An Everyday God* by James Taylor:

Communion Keeps Getting Better (Excerpt)

My very first communion, I recall, was a disappointment
I have shared in communion in a college chapel, served by students. I've had it in an isolated Indian fishing village on Canada's west coast, and in a Newfoundland outport, where Atlantic surf smashed against the rocks only yards from the church's steps...

I've received communion in other countries...

I remember especially communion in Africa...The singing, though magnificent, was all in the local dialect. I understood none of the hymns, none of the preaching.

Until the end of the service. When the minister stood, and raised the bread and broke it, I knew exactly what he was saying: "This is my body which was broken for you."

And when he held up the cup, I knew again what he was saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink this in remembrance of me."

Until then, I had been feeling lost, lonely, a stranger in an alien land. Suddenly, I realized that though I was halfway around the world from my home, I was at home. I was among fellow Christians, and part of a universal family.

The words were different; the Word was the same.

Hymn 169 Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet.

Dismissal and Blessing

Finally, beloved,

whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just,
whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence. and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things. (*Philippians 4: 8*)

The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus;
and may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and abide with you always. Amen.

Doxology: (Hy. 786):

May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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