

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS – 11th October 2020**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of God be always with you.

And also, with you.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of this land in which we live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nation past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

Whatever is true and honourable is before us in the life of Christ this day. In every moment lies a new possibility, and an invitation to be present in the gathering of love and justice. The wedding feast of God is a celebration of love for all people and the passion for true community.

The invitation to the church is open before us so that we may clothe ourselves in hope.

Let us lift our hearts to God in worship.

Hymn: 474 (TiS) 'Here in this place'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

We bring you our thanks, O God, for the wedding feast of life, for the beauty of your hospitality and your invitation to celebration.

We rejoice in the wonder of unexpected moments when we find ourselves gathered into your company.

We thank you for your introduction for those who stand for peace and who are clothed in the garments of your glory.

Thank you for your refusal to settle for lives lived in triviality and indulgence. We know that life like that is far removed from that of your holy community.

O Christ, you graciously invite us to the feast of your divine life, but sometimes we are tempted to delay our response to you. We detour into trivial activities, or busy ourselves with commitments which are to our own advantage.

We convince ourselves that we are choosing what is important and that other things can wait until we are ready.

Forgive us, Jesus Christ. Call to us again and give us the wisdom to accept your invitation.

If we come into your presence clothed in self-righteousness, or with assumptions and certainties which are arising from your life with us: Forgive us Jesus Christ.

When we fail to see what your people must wear in kindness and respect for others and openness to relationship: forgive us, Jesus Christ. Call to us again and give us the wisdom which flows from your grace. **Amen.**

Declaration of Forgiveness:

Over and over again, when we stand in humility, the voice of Christ comes to us in welcome and compassion.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Readings: Isaiah 25: 1-9, Mathew 22: 1-14

Hymn: 647 (TiS) 'Comfort, comfort'.

Message: 'Invitation to life in abundance'. The parable of the wedding banquet (Mathew 22: 1-14).

The kingdom of heaven is compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son, but the people invited to the banquet refused to come (22: 1-3)

The first invitees were special people. They refused to come.

Many commentators identify these people, the first invitees, as the Israelites who expected the Messiah but could not believe in Jesus and therefore Jesus' claim to be the Messiah became a stumbling block for them

We read in Mathew 23: 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing".

The expected VIP guests are unwilling to accept the invitation and to attend the banquet. They have refused participation in the life of the kingdom where needs are met, and lives are filled with grace and righteousness.

The consequences of their refusal to be part of this heavenly banquet is that when the second invitation came, they became violent. It is also true in our world today. Much of the violence is caused by those who have refused the invitation to the heavenly banquet in Jesus Christ.

Though the second invitation went out with more appeal – there would be plenty to eat, fatted cattle and oxen have been prepared and ready for the feast and most appealing is that the invitation came from the king himself. An honour that should not be refused.

But they seized the messengers and mistreated them and killed them, which outraged the king who would have dominion over them anyway.

Their violence would not go unpunished as we see at the conclusion of this parable. All because they refused the invitation to a heavenly banquet.

The Hebrews had often killed the prophets that God had sent to them. They would do the same to the Son of the Father who through him invited them to the heavenly kingdom.

The king then sent out his troops to destroy the murderers and burn their cities.

Then the king sent out an eternal and a universal invitation. It is for all people good and bad, from street corners and marketplaces and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Then there is another twist in this parable. The king expects those who attend to have the proper attire that reflects his gracious invitation and the nature of this heavenly kingdom. But he found a man who was not wearing the proper wedding clothes of the kingdom.

The king wanted to know how this man got in without the proper dress, but the man was silent.

Many commentators and interpreters take the proper wedding dress to be righteousness and found many passages in the bible to back up their arguments. Some even suggests that the dress of righteousness was refused by the man and did not wear it.

The symbolism of this parable is most important. To be in the kingdom of heaven you are expected to be robed in righteousness, justice, mercy and love. To be in the kingdom of heaven is to live in peace and to refuse to robe ourselves in them have consequences just like those who refused the invitation in the first place.

The parable concluded with the explanation that 'Many are called, but few are chosen.'

The invitation has gone out to all who listen, but some refused to listen. Some wanted to come but refuse to submit to the nature of the kingdom to participate in love and mercy to all.

Many people will reject the invitation. In our time the invitation goes out from the church of Christ by the Spirit. Whoever wills may come, robe themselves in justice and mercy, love and forgiveness. Eternal qualities befitting eternal life in the eternal kingdom.

Amen.

Notices:

Offering:

Prayers of the People:

Be near to us now, Jesus Christ.

Make our longings for the church and the world part of your invitation to a fuller life, we pray.

Clothe us in robes of humility and openness to the needs of others so that we do not close our eyes to their realities or cover our ears to dim their cries.

Lead us in your ways of justice, that we may learn to live together in peace and share the abundance of your hospitality.

God of justice, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks, O God, that you bring salvation to those who have turned aside from your ways: hear our prayers for your church throughout the world.

We pray for all with responsibility of leadership in your church; for our ministers and all share in the life of our congregations.

Equip us for work in your service, that we may minister faithfully to your people and tell your good news of salvation and love.

God of grace, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks, O God, that you have shown your people how to live together in love: hear our prayers for all with whom our lives are bound.

We pray for all in this community who are homeless or unemployed; for work colleagues, neighbours, our families.

Teach us to live as a community, that no one is neglected, unvalued or excluded and those in need receive care and respect.

God of love, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks, O God, that you bring consolation, healing and hope to your people: hear our prayers for all in trouble or distress.

We pray for those who are lonely or anxious and for all who grieve; for the sick and those in pain and for all who are close to death.

Be present with all who suffer, that they may find release from their pain and know the comfort of your peace.

God of compassion, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks, O God, that you invite us to eat at your heavenly banquet: hear our prayers for all who have died in your love.

We pray for your faithful servants of every age; those of these congregations who have gone before us and all whom we have loved.

Clothe us in your justice, truth, compassion and love, that, when you call us to your wedding feast, we may be found ready, and, with all your saints, enter into the joy of your eternal presence.

God of grace, in your mercy, **hear our prayer. Amen.**

Hymn: 545 (TiS) 'Shout for joy, the Lord has let us feast'.

Blessings:

Go in peace as the guests at Christ's holy meal.

And may we be clothed in the garments of Christ's embraced in the gathering of God and fed by the nurturing life of the Spirit. **Amen.**

778 (TiS) 'Shalom to you now'.