St James 11/10/26. 8am.

Isaiah 25. 1-9, Philippians 4. 1-9.

St Matthew Ch. 22 vs 1-14

St James Sunday 11/10/26.

Most of us, I'm sure, will have experienced the pain of rejection. If we are parents and our children are rejected for any reason, then the pain extends to us as well. Generally speaking, we all like to feel that we're accepted and wanted and that goes for our good intentions as well.

In the parable we've just heard Jesus tells the story of a king who had good intentions. He gave a wedding banquet for his son, whom he clearly loved, and Jesus compares it to what he calls: 'The Kingdom of Heaven'.

Jesus was very fond of bringing the 'kingdom of heaven' into everyday life and so his parables will often speak of crops, fishing, losing things, finding things and today, invitations. Here is a special invitation from a king, who we may understand as God. It's his desire that his joy in his son's marriage be shared... and so invitations have gone out. The time has come for the party and those who received those invitations are called to the banquet.

According to the Philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, givers of banquets send out their summonses for guests to arrive when everything is ready for the feast. I suppose it puts a stop to people standing watching as you cook!

But this feast is treated with disdain; as the invited guests find something better to do with their time. Not only that but they mistreat, and even murder, the ones who beg them to come. It all results in an angry host who takes retribution.

Throughout the bible we find, in the main, a very patient God; with the Israelites collectively, and with individuals. Through the prophet Hosea, for instance, God reveals his nature in Hosea's patience with his unfaithful

wife and compares that situation with his own experience in dealing with his unfaithful ‘Chosen People’.

In respect of this parable, though, some interpreters say that Jesus is referring to pious Jews of the time who reject the gospel, others say that it’s about Jews and Gentiles, the first group who are God’s chosen and the others who are non-Jews. Still others say that the emphasis should not be on the guests who refuse to come to the feast but on the readiness of the host to fill the table.

In the mouth of Jesus, it becomes a warning not to refuse the offer of salvation. It also includes that awful incident of the man who doesn’t have on a wedding garment. He’s inappropriately dressed. That’s been variously interpreted. What emerges is the need to be an acceptable guest at a wedding banquet; someone who’s given careful thought to the way he is dressed. At a deeper level it could be to do with the man’s spiritual state.

Where does all this leave us, though, who have responded to the Great Commission given by Jesus: ‘Go into the entire world and preach the gospel?’ Well, if we are to be imitators of Christ and learn something of the nature of God and believe in a life to come then we have our part to play in that call to the great feast and a responsibility to encourage others.

Firstly, it might be necessary to take stock of where **we** are with God. Is there a need for repentance, or perhaps a renewed willingness to be seriously involved in the work of Christ’s church? To **do** something, to take up our cross,, whatever that might be.

Today, the gospel continues to meet with rejection. Week by week I read in the Church Times how in some parts of the world, Christians suffer for their faith. I read of church buildings being desecrated, villages destroyed and people killed. Yes, the gospel does meet with rejection. Maybe it has always done so.

We have to say, that often in this country churches can be half empty. Like those who were invited to the marriage feast people find something that they would prefer to do with their time rather than meet to worship God.

And yet, this banquet we've heard of today speaks of a God who gives freely, whose invitation to come to the feast now extends to all. In the words of that old hymn: 'whosoever will may come, send the proclamation over vale and hill, tis the loving Father calls the wanderer home, whosoever will may come'.

Amen.