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**Sunday 11 October to Sunday 18 October**

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Sunday 11 October 2020

# A fitting response

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son’ (Matthew 22:2).**

Read Matthew 22:1–14

This week we consider the question: what is a fitting response to God’s generous invitation to join ‘the banquet’?

What sort of a person doesn’t accept an invitation to a royal wedding? Today, one would assume that such a person was a republican; someone who does not accept the king’s authority and prefers to keep open his or her options for whom they will follow.

In today's story, the king starts by inviting the most obvious guests to his son’s wedding. But he’s not put off in his intention to hold a banquet when they decline his invitation and even kill his messengers.

The king is prepared to invite anyone and everyone. They needn’t worry that they don’t have something suitable to wear because the king will even supply their outfit.

As recipients of such generosity, what are the guests expected to do in response? Simply accept his generosity. One man prefers a little autonomy and wears his own clothes. The trouble is that what he chooses to wear will never get him into the great hall.

Of course, the king in this story represents God, and the banquet is God’s kingdom, both here on earth and in heaven forever. Those who first heard this parable would have known that those invited first were the Jewish people and that the messengers represented their prophets, whose voices the people had rejected.

God invites us to the banquet and provides what we need to join the feast: we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. What is a fitting response to God’s generosity?

We simply turn up. This week will consider some ways we can ‘turn up’ as residents of God’s kingdom.

**Dear loving God, I know that there is no way I can ever repay your invitation to ‘the banquet.’ Nevertheless, I pray that you will help me to grow in my loving response to your kindness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Monday 12 October 2020

# Obey

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey”’ (Exodus 24:7).**

Read Exodus 24:3–11

God initiated a covenant with the Hebrew people by instructing Moses on Mount Sinai. In response, the people said, not once but twice: ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do’.

That is a bold statement! That the people could say it so readily suggests they had a bit of a journey ahead of them. (Okay, so I read ahead and know the plot!)

What did the Hebrew people agree to do? Jesus told us that the laws (both old and new) can be summed up as: ‘Love God, love one another’ (Matthew 22:37–40).

The most loving things we can do might vary from one occasion to another. For example, a person in crisis might need urgent practical help, while afterward, it might be more loving to leave them space to regain control, supporting them while they do things themselves. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is to accept someone else’s generosity or hospitality rather than insisting that we must be the provider!

A proper response to God’s initiative is to obey. I am so grateful for all the ways God helps me to understand God’s will and to obey. Through God’s word and sacraments, Christian community, and the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit, I know that I remain a welcome guest at the banquet and am empowered to be more gracious toward others.

**Dear God, like the Hebrew people, I am often more confident than I should be that I am living in obedience to your will. Thank you for forgiving me, and for the many ways that you keep drawing me to yourself. Please renew me in my baptism once more today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Tuesday 13 October 2020

# Gather

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘On the first day of the week we came together to break bread’ (Acts 20:7a).**

Read Acts 20:7–12

How do we respond to God’s initiative of inviting us into a relationship? We gather in the name of Jesus, to be in relationship with each other.

And in the name of Christ, miraculous things happen. Sometimes we see healing miracles like the one in this text, where the young man fell from the window to his death, and Paul, with Jesus' power, restored his life.

When we gather to give thanks for Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we always experience the miracles of faith grown, hope restored, and the community that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

As we have faced various restrictions on our ability to gather this year, have you reflected on what gathering means for you as a Christian, as a human?

My daughter has friends who have not grown up in the tradition of gathering weekly to worship God. As loneliness is a significant concern for young people, they think that the fact that she has a group, such as a congregation to which she belongs, is really special. It is a place where, no matter what else is going on in your life, you have something bigger than yourself in which you can turn up and be part.

And God keeps taking the initiative and says: ‘Come; you are welcome here. You are my precious child; you belong, and you are always welcome at my feast’.

**Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving yourself so that we may know what it is to live life to the fullest. As we gather in whatever way we can, help us to grow as your body. Amen.**

Wednesday 14 October 2020

# Care

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘For when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk’ (1 Corinthians 11:21).**

Read 1 Corinthians 11:20–32

As we gather in the name of Jesus Christ, we are united in Christian community. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can look at one another and ourselves as people who were hanging around on a street corner when suddenly we found ourselves invited to the wedding of a prince!

In today’s text, the believers at Corinth are criticised for their disorderly behaviour at the agape feast – a combined potluck meal and celebration of the Lord’s supper. The richer converts who could bring more to the shared meal were also consuming more, oblivious to the needs of those who had less and were quite possibly hungry a lot of the time. The behaviour of the wealthier people was considered disorderly because of their rowdy partying, and also because they were not following the law of love, but rather staying comfortably in their existing cliques.

According to this text and many others in both the Old and New Testaments, a fitting response to our adoption into the kingdom of God is to show care and compassion toward the vulnerable among us.

This is so important at a time when, due to economic changes related to COVID-19, we are at risk of seeing an increasing gap between the richest and the poorest. There are so many opportunities to care in our Christian communities, neighbourhoods, and wider communities. We need gentle and humble hearts so that we can follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance in caring for others.

**Holy Spirit, give me eyes to notice the vulnerable people around me, a generous heart, and confidence to do the next right and loving thing. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.**

Thursday 15 October 2020

# Repent

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me’ (Revelation 3:20).**

Read Revelation 3:14–22

Have you been to a function where there was someone with whom you had an unresolved issue? And because of this issue, you didn’t wish to interact with them, so you didn’t? I have. And the more you do this, the easier it is to keep that relationship lukewarm, safe from being too hot or too cold.

Each of us, in some way or another, come to the king’s banquet but avoid facing our host. There are barriers to our wholehearted participation in the kingdom of God. I don’t mean that we are unenthusiastic, but that we each keep some sinful attitudes and unresolved issues or wounds buried so deep that we are blissfully unaware that we are working against our best intentions.

We might be wearing the wedding outfit, but our insides are in constant need of a clean-up. While we say that Jesus is the guest of honour, we put him outside the banquet. Meanwhile, Jesus stands there knocking, and he asks to be invited back into our hearts and lives.

A fitting response to our banquet invitation is to repent – to turn towards our host and accept all the gifts our host offers. To be made uncomfortable in our complacency, to discard the superficial, false garments we wear and be clothed in Christ, and to have our eyes opened. Not because we need to for our salvation, but because that is the sort of kingdom it is, and because the banquet invitation package includes the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, enabling us to repent and be renewed.

**Dear Jesus, thank you for waiting for me to answer the door. Thank you even more for your presence at the table with me, and for teaching me how to be human. Amen.**

Friday 16 October 2020

# Receive

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God”’ (Revelation 19:9).**

Read Revelation 19:5–10

This week we began with a parable of a wedding feast, and now we arrive at a vision of the wedding feast.

We know that the bridegroom, referred to here as the Lamb, is Jesus Christ and that we, the universal church, are Jesus’ bride.

We have our wedding outfits: the fine linen of righteousness. According to today’s text, this fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (verse 8). This righteousness is not our own but is yet another element of the special package available to wedding guests in the kingdom of God.

There is only one way to access this package: to receive this generous invitation, which then leads us to worship God. In receiving, we acknowledge that as much as we would like to make ourselves worthy of this invitation, it is only by God’s grace that we can say:

‘Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!’ (verses 6b–7a)

Imagine what it will be like standing among the roaring crowd shouting these words when God reveals his new kingdom, when there is no more sin and suffering, and when all of creation is made new.

Receive.

**Jesus, Lamb of God, I rest in your righteousness. Thank you that because you died, I may have life in all its fullness. Amen.**

Saturday 17 October 2020

# Worship

by Kathy Matuschka

**‘Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name … Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness’ (Psalm 96:8a,9a).**

Read Psalm 96:1–9

What is another fitting response to our unexpected invitation to the wedding feast? Worship.

If you are reading this, it means you are committed to a habit of daily worship. You consider it important – essential even – to come before the king of heaven and earth.

What are you doing here? Are you reading, reflecting, and praying because you know that your life works better when you do? Are you bringing your needs to the throne room because you know it is where you find the power to bring about the good you seek in yourself and our world? Do you come because there is a particular need that consumes your every moment? Or are you currently going through the motions of faith, hoping that as you keep up faithful Christian practices, the pilot light will reignite, and you will find new hope and joy?

Welcome.

Come as you are; join the heavens, the seas, the fields and the forests (verses 11–12), and worship.

As I write this, some of us can gather with our congregation on a Sunday, and others cannot. Whatever your situation, I pray that the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

**Dear God of splendour and majesty, strength, and glory, thank you for inviting me to your banquet. There is none beside you; there is no kingdom in which I’d rather be. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit so that my life may reflect my gratitude that you invite me into fellowship with you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 18 October 2020

# Whose image is on you?

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21).**

Read Matthew 22:15–22

Often the first question we ask someone doesn’t get to the heart of the matter we’re trying to address. We need to have a follow-up question that can further clarify and uncover the truth.

Concerning this interaction with Jesus in today's text, a person once observed that there should have been a follow-up question. There wasn’t, of course, because the Pharisees and Herodians weren’t sincerely seeking the truth from Jesus, but were out to entrap him. But for us disciples, Jesus’ teaching on giving to the emperor what belongs to him, and God what belongs to him, invites the obvious next question: ‘What belongs to God?’ Then perhaps Jesus would have answered that question with another question: ‘Whose image is on you?’

Jesus’ mission was not to overthrow the secular government of his time, although they were essentially foreign occupiers of his homeland. The implication of his words here is that disciples of Jesus Christ should acknowledge and respect their governing authorities. One of the practical ways of doing this is to pay one’s taxes. The image of the emperor is on the coin. The government has minted this money as part of their role to keep good order in society. So, respect and support them. Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s.

But when it comes to what belongs to God, remember whose image is on you! You are made in the image of God, and so you belong to him. As Jesus has this discussion, he is on the way to the cross to give his life to redeem you; that is, to buy you back. The price was not gold, silver, or any other coin, but his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. In Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the kingdom of heaven, in which we are now citizens, has drawn near. Thus, Christians live in a unique relationship to the government, both respecting them and obeying their laws, while also acknowledging an authority far greater to which they, too, are subject.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for creating us in your image and for sending your son, our Lord Jesus, to redeem us. Please help us, by your Holy Spirit, to live in a well-ordered relationship to our governing authorities. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**