

When Elke and I were reflecting on this service and the Gospel reading set for today, the Parable of the Great Banquet, we hit on the idea of making this service a service of Holy Communion. Then continuing on from our Service of Harvest Thanksgiving last week, we decided to continue with this theme of thankfulness. Some of our young people have offered some pointers to this in this short clip.

Film clip

Of course, the opposite of thankfulness is ingratitude. That is what is at the heart of our Gospel reading, the Parable of the Great Banquet and the simple video that followed it – the friends that would not come to the birthday party.

Another expression that we might use in this regard is that of being taken for granted. If we take someone or something for granted then, when all is said and done, we don't think them to be of value or importance. We can all recognise the hurt that would have been felt by the host of the banquet. Banquets, wedding banquets in the society of that day would have been very public affairs – if the banquet had been a flop then the host would not just have been hurt, he would have lost face. He had gone to great trouble; he had laid on the best of food

and all the extras. But for those invited – it was nice to get the invitation but people were busy, they had better things to be doing.

We all know what it feels like if we feel friends have let us down. Something inside us hurts – they don't even see that they have hurt us. I remember being at a birthday party as a child. We had all brought presents. At the end of the party as we were all going home, the birthday boy handed a present, a construction kit, back. He explained that he didn't actually collect these particular kits so he might as well have it back. I can still see the look of hurt on Anthony Palmer's face as he took it back.

Of course, Jesus was talking about a lot more than just a man putting on big dinner party for his ungrateful friends. He is talking about God's invitation to each one of us to be part of his kingdom. He has gone to great lengths to prepare a place for us. He has sent his son Jesus Christ to live among us, to teach, to suffer, die and rise again.

The invitation is there for us to follow. Sometimes we don't hear because there is so much else on our mind – we'll get around to it when we have got school, work, hobbies or whatever all sorted out. Or maybe life is difficult at the minute and it is hard sometimes to believe that God wants me, God cares for me.

But the call goes out, and goes out, and goes out yet again as God looks for people to enter into the life and work of his Kingdom. God loves us; he loves us not because we are extra good, extra talented. He loves us simply because he loves us – how do we show our love and thankfulness to him? I often think that the words that come near the end of our Service of Holy Communion sum things up rather nicely as we say:

we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

We offer ourselves in love and service; to say the things, to do the things he wants us to do and say; to be the people he wants us to be in our care for people, in our sharing of the Gospel in all that we say and do; in our commitment to justice, in our care for this beautiful world he has given us to enjoy.

That his name be glorified and his kingdom come.