

VISION - CARE/PRAYER
LUKE 14: 12-24

Good morning, welcome to our online service; I am Kemi.

Let us pray. *Heavenly Father, in Jesus' name we pray that as we hear your message today, which will come from the word of God, our faith will be increased. We ask Father that you use your word which is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, to rightly divide us even to sword and spirit. Use your word Father to expose the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. Amen.*

Today's reading is from the book of Luke, chapter 14, verses 12 to 24.

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²¹ "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

²² "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

²³ "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

In Luke, Chapter 14, Jesus teaches in parables about seeking honour and how to invite those in need to a feast, rather than families and friends.

We read that a Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him. Pharisees were Jesus's opponents who frequently clashed with him over his interpretation of the law; with humility, he honoured the Pharisee's invitation to dinner; he could have refused, but he didn't.

In verses 12-14 Jesus observed that there were groups of guests missing, but he advised the host not to be exclusive about whom he invited. His father opens His kingdom and welcomes everyone; by inviting those in need, he will be blessed as these groups of people would not repay him, but the host would be rewarded at resurrection.

This passage tells us how Jesus would like us to love and care for each other, regardless of our age, gender, sex and race, in unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4).

Verses 15-24 tell how a man sitting at the table with Jesus envisioned the glory of God's kingdom, but he did not yet understand how to have a share in it. In this passage two invitations were sent out to guests: the first to announce the event of a feast, an invitation to know Christ and serve on a either small or wider scale, and the second to tell the guests that the feast was ready; but the guest in Jesus's story insulted the host by making excuses. Many people turned down the invitation because the timing was inconvenient for them to attend. Who knows, maybe people avoid responding to God's call because people of God sometimes behave that way. Are you one of those people? Have you ever tasted that the Lord is good?

In Israel's history (Isaiah 25), God's invitation came from Moses and the prophets – a marvellous prophecy of all peoples, not only for the Jews – and Jesus together at God's messianic feast, celebrating the overthrow of evil and the joy of eternity with God. This shows that God intends His saving messages to go out to the whole world, not just to the Jews during the feast, but everyone. The master in the story sent his servant into the streets to invite the needy, so God sent His son to needy people to tell them that God's kingdom had arrived and was ready for them. It is our call to serve in St John's. God is calling us to use the gifts He has given to us to serve Him and not to leave it too late to answer to His calling. Sometimes we can be sheep that have gone astray, but He welcomes us back just as the prodigal son asked for forgiveness (Luke 15: 11-32). Our response to both passages is to focus on pastoral care, prayer and care which is already in place. Prayer, during the 19th century, was viewed as a stage in the development of religion from a magical to a higher stage. It is defined as talking to God, but it is much more than that – it is an act of worship that glorifies God and reinforces our need for Him through living a life. Prayer deepens our faith; to develop our intimate relationship with Christ by praying can help us come to a greater understanding of God's purpose for our lives.

Caring at the core of Christianity is caring for one another by having a heart that cares; it shows that we are seeking to be like Jesus. We can see in the scripture the amount of love Jesus showed for everyone. No matter where Jesus went, he showed love and compassion for all the people that he met. It is very important as Christians that we follow in the footsteps of the Lord and love all the people we encounter – especially for someone in need – and listen to them when they need to offload a heartfelt action, and not pretend to have compassion that moves mountains. It is not enough that you feel compassionate towards someone in need – even if you shed tears out of pity – if you do nothing about the situation. In that case the compassion is useless; for this reason, see to it that you have the kind of compassion that moves mountains, meaning it should lead you to take action like Jenny Archibald working tirelessly in Syria with her team members, but currently on a break.

Jesus want us to be a person who acts more than talks. If you know someone needing help, then find out what you can do for the person. If there is nothing you can do, then maybe you can connect the person with others who can. Any small intentional help can create a big impact on that person's life. He taught this lesson, because he noticed how guests picked places of honour at the feast (verse 7) and advised people not to rush for the best places, but to offer best places for those who needed them.

In St John's, we are to be willing to serve Christ, by being bold and brave with the help of the Holy Spirit to walk around in the Penge community to tell the good news of Christ. God is calling each one to help to build His Kingdom here in this parish.

The two parables tell us that Jesus reminds us we are called to humbly build his house by caring, praying and serving. If we are to truly humble ourselves, we should be willing to use the talent, time, treasure, strength to care, involve and build as Christ directs by using the parish core values passionately seeking the poor, humbly serving those in need.

Having gone through the history of St John's, it shows in the records that since the year 1837. St John's has been caring for the community of Penge, and the church was feeding the poor families of Penge. In 2020, St John's is still feeding the poor families of Penge. In 1837, St John's raised enough money to pay for the salary of the first teacher to teach the children of Penge. St John's church (original building) became St John's church school in 1860. In 2020, St John's church partners with St. John's primary school, food bank, pastoral support and Jesus. St John's is in contact and liaising with churches in Penge, Living Well Bromley (Holy Trinity church) – a community that supports people with different needs, including addictions, homelessness and mental health problems – as well as Christ Church Anerley engaging ex-offenders in a car wash business in Penge and surrounding areas.

At this time of a pandemic worldwide disease with outbreaks of coronavirus (Covid-19) occurring in many countries, an alternative way for pastoral caring has been planned.

An online service for the good of the Penge community and surrounding areas, the pastoral care is extended to our nation and our world in unity in the body of Christ. We heard the Bishop of Canterbury's virtual message telling us that the world should continue to pray for hope, faith and strength, to keep loving and caring for each other during this time of struggle. We are doing incredibly well, but prayer is the key. We continue to pray without ceasing. As Ian said at the launching of the vision, we need to pray to God to build our faith and with God's help we will build St. John's as a home for ourselves, the Penge community and surrounding areas. Prayer is at the centre; it will mature our faith to love and care to continue nowadays with the incredible care of 1837. We are to involve ourselves, to volunteer, help, use the talents God has giving us to serve faithfully. This is an invitation to the feast through the death and resurrection of Christ. We are born again to the great feast He offers.

Let us not make excuses to avoid responding to God's call. Jesus reminds us that the time will come when God will put His invitation away and offer it to others, so then it will be too late to get into the banquet. He is calling you and me to be his people to spread the good news of Christ throughout the world. Our parish motto for 2018 was John 15: 16: "You did

not choose me, but I choose and appointed you, so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” God is telling us, if we claim we are followers of Christ, He wants us to be in union with Him to become a disciple by telling His good stories to our community, nation and world.

We need volunteers to help in all areas. Some members are heavily involved, some are involved, and some are yet to be. 2 Corinthians 12: 9 says: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness, therefore, I will boast more gladly about my weakness so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Paul urged us that God’s power, that is displayed in our weakness, should give us courage and hope to carry on with the task before us. As we recognise our limitations, we will depend more on God for effectiveness rather than our own energy and God does not grant superhuman ability to accomplish anything, but the power we receive in union with Christ is sufficient to do His will. We are called as a church to build a safe and welcoming Christian household by collaborating and working as one body in Christ.

There is one body. Unity does not just happen; we have to work at it. Often, differences among people can lead to division, but this should not be true in the church. Instead of concentrating on what divides us, we should remember what unites us: one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God to build a safe church.

Is God calling you to serve His purpose in this small corner of His kingdom? If so, speak to the church wardens. There is still room to answer God’s call to serve.

God’s salvation is freely offered but to nourish our souls, we must eagerly receive it. I’d like to end with a prayer.

Dear God, we praise your Holy Name. Thank you, God, for purifying our minds and hearts with your word. Thank you for the good time you have given us. Help us to find more time to do this again. May we continue to walk in purity, peace, love and joy. Let your name be glorified in heaven and on earth. In Jesus’ name I believe and pray. Amen.