

2023-06-25 ... 6.30pm Evensong Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

(1 Samuel 24 1-17) Luke 14: 12-24

Food plays a significant role in many stories of both the Old and New Testaments and one aspect of this comes from a few verses in **Isaiah 25 6&9**

***On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.
⁹ It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.***

This is the Heavenly Banquet. A place at this feast is our hope in heaven.

St Alkmund's headline statement is **Our church is a place where all are welcome and God can be found.** In our Profile Document we have emphasised this inclusive nature of our Benefice because it is important that our next Rector shares this ethos with us.

Kathleen Norris writes about Benedictine hospitality and its open nature. She says

'I have been told by monks and nuns that hospitality is the fruit of their celibacy; they ... mean to ... live in such a way as to remain unencumbered by exclusive sexual relationships. The goal is being free to love others, non-exclusively and non-possessively, both within their monastic community and without.

Benedict in his Rule instructs Benedictines not to turn their backs on the world, even as they seek to detach themselves from worldly values. This seems to be the core of Benedictine hospitality. To reject the world is to reject other people. And to reject other people is to reject Christ himself.'

An American priest called Nadia Bolz-Weber describes the church she has established to have a particular welcome for 'irregular (as well as regular) people' as her 'spiritual community, where messy beautiful people come as they are to gather around a story and a table'

This evening's dinner-party parables use the practicalities of throwing a party to illustrate what life should be like then and now for the people of the House of God. And it is very much inclusive. I wonder if, when you heard it, you identified with any particular character.

Perhaps you heard yourself as the person issuing the invitations. Perhaps you have expressed frustration when people haven't even bothered to reply to your invitation. Could you, like the party giver of the parable, swap your anger for grace, and throw open your generosity to those you don't know so that your dining-room is filled and your food is eaten?

Perhaps you know yourself as the reluctant guest who has far more interesting things going on in your own life, or pretend that you have, and don't give a thought to what opportunity you might be missing out on.

Perhaps you are the slave, the master's messenger, who has to work out how to entice those who don't think they are good enough to share in the great gifts offered to come in.

How do we express God's hospitality ourselves and as a parish church? We have the story and the table, pray that we can learn how so that every corner of this building is full and spilling out on to the streets with people confident of their place at the heavenly banquet, here now and evermore.