

Sermon and Readings 20th Sunday After Pentecost 11 October 2026

Exodus 32.1–14

¹ When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ² Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ ³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.’ ⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. ⁷ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’ ⁹ The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.’ ¹¹ But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, ‘O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, “I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.”’ ¹⁴ And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Psalm 106.1–6, 20–24

¹ Praise the Lord; O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good:
and his mercy endures for ever.

² Who can express the mighty acts of the Lord:
or fully voice his praise?

³ Blessed are those who act according to justice:
who at all times do the right.

⁴ Remember me, O Lord, when you visit your people with your favour:
and come to me also with your salvation,

⁵ That I may see the prosperity of your chosen:
that I may rejoice with the rejoicing of your people,
and exult with those who are your own.

⁶ We have sinned like our ancestors:
we have acted perversely and done wrong.

²⁰ At Horeb they made themselves a calf:
and bowed down in worship to an image.

²¹ And so they exchanged the glory of God:
for the likeness of an ox that eats hay.

²² They forgot God who was their saviour:
that had done such great things in Egypt,

²³ Who had worked his wonders in the land of Ham:
and his terrible deeds at the Red Sea.

²⁴ Therefore he thought to destroy them:
had not Moses his servant stood before him in the breach,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

Philippians 4

¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to

God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. ¹⁵ You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. ¹⁶ For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. ¹⁸ I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Matthew 22.1–14

¹ Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm,

another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Sermon

We have all prepared for a special occasion—a birthday, a dinner party and wondered: will folk come? You organise the food, arrange tables, you send the invitations, all is ready. The day arrives, and the invited guests call to say, “Sorry, I can’t make it.” That is the scene Jesus is describing in today’s Gospel.

A king prepares a wedding banquet for his son. Everything is ready. The food is ready; a table is waiting. The invitation has gone out. But the guests refuse to come. One goes off to his farm. Another goes to his business. Others reject the invitation even more fiercely. The king has offered them a place at his table, but they have decided that other things are more important. And perhaps that is where this parable begins to speak to us. Because God is always inviting us into relationship with him. God says: Come. Come into my presence and receive my grace, my forgiveness. Come and share in my kingdom. Come to the table. But sometimes we are simply too busy.

There is always something else demanding our attention. And that takes us to our reading from Exodus. Moses has gone up Mount Sinai to meet with God. But he is gone longer than the people expected. They became impatient. They say to Aaron, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us.” So, Aaron collects their gold, melts it down and makes a golden calf.

It is easy for us to look at that story and think, “How could they possibly do that?”

These are the people whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt. They have witnessed the plagues, walked through the Red Sea, have been fed in the wilderness. They have seen the power and faithfulness of God. And now they are worshipping a golden calf. Psalm 106 describes it powerfully: “They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.” They exchanged the Creator for something they had created themselves. Yet, I don’t think we should judge them too fast. Because we create golden calves as well. Our idols may not be made of gold. Our golden calves might be our possessions, money, work, reputations, our success, comfort and our need to be in control. Even good things can become idols when they become more important than God.

The Israelites became frightened because Moses was taking too long. God seemed distant. So, they created something they could see, touch. Something they could control. And we do something similar. When life becomes uncertain, we can begin looking for something that will make us feel secure. We tell ourselves, “If I just had enough money, everything would be all right.” “If I could just get everything organised.” “If this person would change.” “If life would just go according to my plans.” But none of those things can give us the security that comes from God. And this is where Paul's words to the Philippians become so important. Paul says: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.” Notice that Paul does not say, “Rejoice when everything is going well.” He says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

Then he says: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” When life becomes uncertain, Israel makes a golden calf. Paul offers another response. Pray. Bring your fears, worries, uncertainties to God. Bring the things you cannot control to God. And then comes one of the most beautiful promises in Scripture: “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” It doesn't mean all our problems suddenly disappear and everything will turn

out exactly as we want. It means that in the middle of uncertainty, we discover that we are not alone. God is with us. And God's peace can hold us even when life doesn't make sense.

There is also something beautiful in the Exodus story that we can easily miss. The people have failed terribly. God has every reason to give up on them. But Moses stands before God and intercedes for them. He pleads for mercy and God shows mercy. That points us towards something at the very heart of our Christian faith. We too have someone who intercedes for us. Jesus Christ. When we wander away, Christ calls us home. When we fail, Christ offers forgiveness and when we place other things before God, Christ continues to invite us back. Thus, that brings us again to the wedding banquet. When the first guests refuse to come, the king does something unexpected, he sends his servants out again. "Go therefore into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." The invitation becomes wider. Bring them in, the good and the bad, the respectable and the questionable. The people everyone expected to see there and the people nobody expected to see there. God wants the banquet filled. That is grace.

The kingdom of God is not a private dinner party for people who have managed to get everything right. It is God's table of grace, and the invitation goes out into the streets: Come. Come as you are, receive, belong. But Jesus' parable also reminds us that grace asks for a response. The strange ending about the guest without the wedding garment tells us that accepting God's invitation is not simply turning up and carrying on exactly as before. Grace changes us. When we accept the invitation of Christ, we begin to put on a different way of life. Paul describes something of that new life: "Whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable think about these things." In other words: Let Christ shape your thoughts, shape your priorities, your relationships, shape the way you treat others and let Christ shape the way you live. So perhaps today's readings leave us with a few questions. What is your golden calf? - what is the thing you are tempted to trust more than God? And lastly: How are you responding to God's invitation? Because the invitation has already been sent. The table is prepared. Christ has opened the way. God is saying: Come.

Come when you are joyful, when you are struggling, when your faith is strong, when you have doubts, when life is going well, when everything seems to be falling apart. Come to the table, into my grace, into my love. And when worry begins to overwhelm you, don't build another golden calf. Pray. Bring it to God. "Rejoice in the Lord always." Trust that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus. The invitation is before us. The table is ready. God's grace is offered. The question is: How will we/you respond? Amen.