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## NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 11, 2020  
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace  
[www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org](http://www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org)

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Can you believe what happened in our first reading today? Even though Israel had seen the invisible GOD in action, they still wanted the familiar gods they could see and shape into whatever image they desired. How much like them we are! Our great temptation is still to shape GOD to our liking – to make Him convenient to obey or ignore. GOD responds in great anger when His mercy is trampled on. The gods we create blind us to the love our loving GOD wants to shower on us. GOD cannot work in us when we elevate anyone or anything above Him. We need to ask ourselves: “What are the false gods in our lives that prevent the true GOD from living in us?”

Egypt had 2 popular gods – a bull and a heifer. The Israelites, fresh from Egypt, found it quite natural to make a golden calf to represent the GOD that had just delivered them from their oppressors. They were apparently weary of a god without a face. But in doing so, they were ignoring the command He had just given them: ^“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” They may even have thought that they were worshipping GOD. Their apparent sincerity was no substitute for obedience or excuse for disobedience.

Even if we do not make idols, we are often guilty of trying to make GOD in our image – moulding Him to fit our expectations, desires, and circumstances. When we do this, we end up worshipping ourselves rather than the GOD who created us – and self-worship, today as in the time of the Israelites, leads to all kinds of immorality. We

need to make sure that our favourite image of GOD is biblical, adequate, and true.

GOD was ready to destroy the whole nation because of their sin. But Moses pleaded for mercy, and GOD spared them. This is one of the countless examples in the Bible of GOD's mercy. Although we deserve His anger, He is willing to forgive and restore us to Himself. Like Moses, we can pray that He will forgive others and use us to bring them to the message of His mercy.

How could GOD relent? GOD did not change His mind in the same way that a parent decides not to discipline a child. Instead, GOD changed His behaviour to remain consistent with His nature. When GOD first wanted to destroy the people, He was acting consistently with His justice. When Moses interceded for the people, GOD relented in order to act consistently with His mercy. GOD had often told the people that if they changed their ways, He would not condemn them. They changed, and GOD forgave them as He had promised.

The passage from the Psalms basically summarises the entire psalm in that it is a song of national repentance as the people return from captivity after GOD patiently delivered them – in spite of their forgetfulness and self-willed rebellion.

^In the passage from his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us to “stand firm in the LORD.” How do we do that? The way to stand firm is to keep our eyes on CHRIST, to remember that this world is not our home, and to focus on the fact that CHRIST will bring everything under His control. Standing firm means steadfastly resisting the negative influences of temptation, false teaching, or persecution. It requires perseverance when we are challenged or opposed. We mustn’t lose heart or give up – because GOD promises to give us strength of character. With the Holy Spirit’s help and with the help of fellow believers, we can stay true to the LORD.

Euodia and Syntyche had been workers for CHRIST in the Philippian Church. Their broken relationship was no

small matter – because many had become believers through their efforts. It is possible to believe in CHRIST, work hard for His kingdom, and yet have broken relationships with others who are committed to the same cause. But there is no excuse for remaining unreconciled. If this is the case with us today, we mustn't let the tension build into an explosion or withdraw and resort to cruel power plays. We must not stand idly by and wait for the dispute to resolve itself – rather we should seek the help of peacemakers.

Those whose names are in the book of life are all who are marked for salvation through their faith in CHRIST. It seems strange that a man in prison would be telling a church to rejoice – but Paul's attitude teaches us an important lesson: Our inner attitudes do not have to reflect our outward circumstances. Paul was full of joy because he knew that no matter what happened to him, JESUS was with him. Several times in this letter, Paul urged the Philippians to be joyful – probably because

they needed to hear this. It's easy to get discouraged about unpleasant circumstances or to take unimportant events too seriously. Let's look at life from a different perspective if things haven't been joyful lately.

Ultimate joy comes from CHRIST dwelling within us. CHRIST is near, and at His second coming we will fully realise this ultimate joy. He who lives within us will fulfil His final purposes for us.

Imagine never being anxious about anything. It seems like an impossibility – all of us have worries of one sort or another. But Paul's advice is to turn our worries into prayers – so when we start to worry, we need to stop and pray.

Our Gospel passage for today is the parable of the wedding banquet. Imagine you have just received an invitation to dinner with your favourite movie star. ^Would you accept the invitation? Wouldn't you probably drop everything, re-arrange your schedule, and

do whatever you needed to be able to hang out with them?

^In today's gospel, a special invitation is being made, but some people are ignoring it. Others are too busy to attend. Some even reject the invitation outright and do violence to the servants issuing the invitation! JESUS uses the invitation of a big party to describe the Kingdom of GOD, the Kingdom of Heaven. In this parable, we are asked to imagine heaven as being the celebration of the ages. The King – GOD – is sparing no expense to ensure that all invited guests – all of GOD's children – will experience the fullness of joy. It is JESUS, through His love for us made manifest in His life, death, and resurrection, who is handing out the invitations.

SO, why would people refuse such an invitation to celebrate with JESUS?

Some people have never experienced GOD's love, so they do not recognise the gift they are being offered. Other people don't make time for GOD. Sometimes



ambition or greed or fear has taken over in their lives – and they are totally focussed on accumulating the most material goods they possibly can. Perhaps they have forgotten that it is GOD who will lead them to a happy life. Others have allowed their anger to harden into violence. They hate other people and have allowed their hatred to get the best of them. Hatred, sadly, drives out love. Often JESUS uses figures of speech and exaggerated language to grab our attention. Otherwise we might miss the point. Many of the Jewish leaders had rejected JESUS and His message. They refused to be part of His Kingdom, to come to the banquet. They didn't believe that JESUS was GOD's Son and didn't approve of some of the things He did – like curing lepers and talking to tax collectors. They believed that GOD's Kingdom was reserved for people like them – who think they did everything right all the time. JESUS was telling them – and US – that GOD's Kingdom is not just for them but for all. Everyone is invited – regardless of whether they are

saints or sinners, old or young, rich, or poor. We all have a choice to accept – or reject – the invitation.

The banquet is a wonderful symbol of the Kingdom of GOD. JESUS assures us that the halls will be filled with guests. And maybe, among the bad and the good, we will meet people we did not expect to be there. This is why JESUS stresses so often that we must not judge others. How will you accept GOD's invitation?



Our Exodus reading shows us that we must resist the great temptation to shape GOD to our liking – to make Him convenient to obey or ignore – to mould a worthless idol and worship it as though it was the living GOD.

Paul teaches us that we need to stand firm in the LORD, be united and be anxious about nothing. If we begin to worry, we should turn our anxieties into prayers.

Lewis Harwood – a New Zealand De la salle brother puts it this way: the image of a wedding evokes many feelings of celebration and joy and sharing with close family and friends. We invite people we love to weddings – those

with whom we want to share the most significant and joyful moments of our lives. Sometimes, however, it is the people we least expect who can become our best friends and our closest companions. There will be numerous people that will influence and teach us different lessons in life that will ultimately give us meaning and purpose. They can teach us about CHRIST and about the ways of goodness, peace, sorrow, and joy. This parable can teach us about our relationship with JESUS and others. Who are the people in your life that give you joy? Do you invite and include people who have touched your heart to share in your joyful moments?



May we pray:

LORD our GOD. You sent Your Son into the world to live with us as one of us, to heal, to teach, to sanctify and to proclaim the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom. Help us to live our Baptism to the full and to find ways to do what JESUS did: to bring joy and life wherever we go,

to lift up the suffering and to tell other people about the new life JESUS has brought us. This we pray in His most precious name. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

GOD's Word 2020

Celebrating the Lectionary – Year A Garrett Publishing, Mulgrave VIC

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