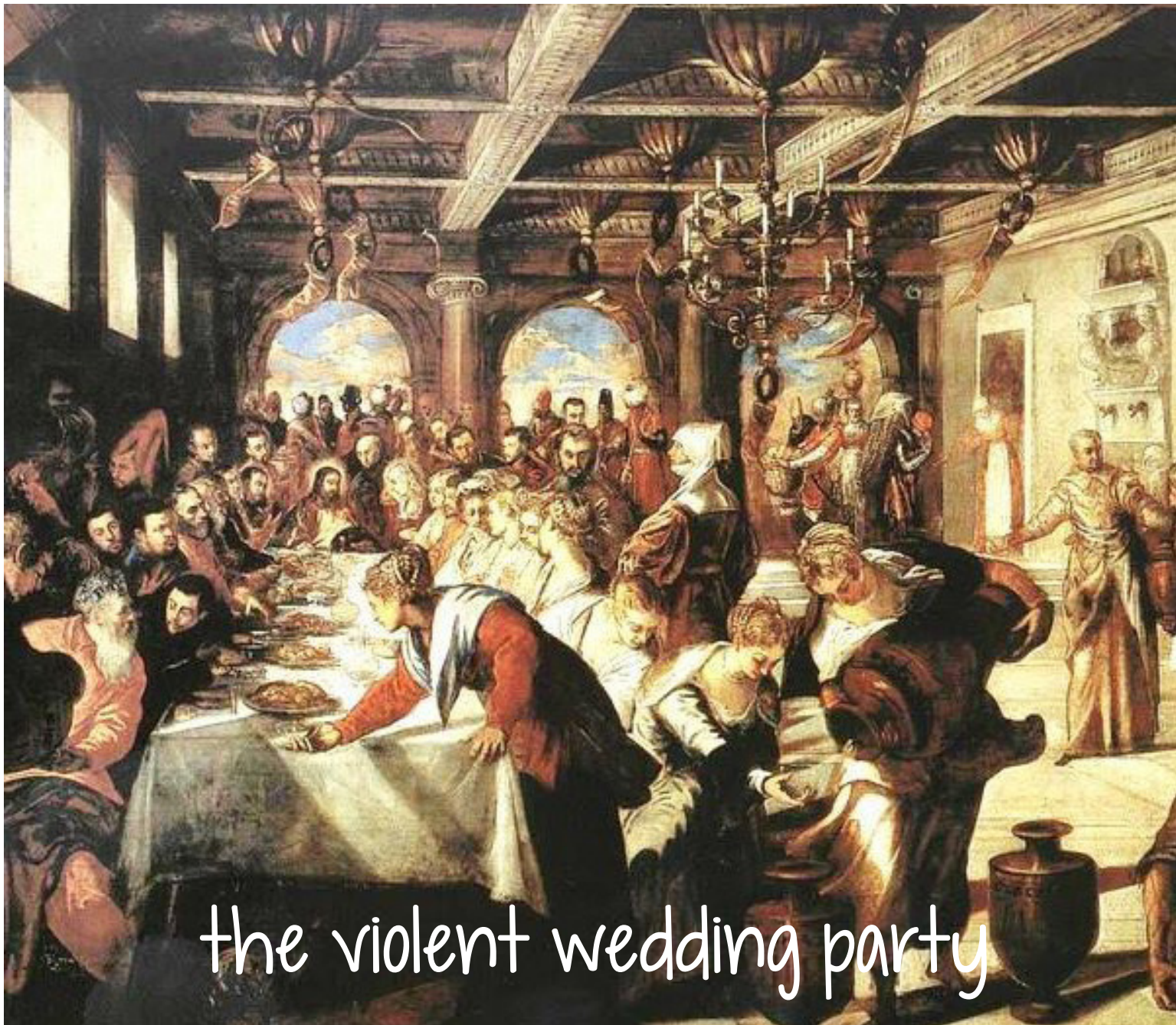


Parramatta City
Uniting Church

Leigh Memorial
Uniting Church

PENTECOST 20



the violent wedding party

God intensely committed to inclusion

15 October 2023

WELCOME A warm welcome as we gather together on this Sunday.

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE

We light this candle to celebrate the inherent worth and dignity
of every person and to share that love
which is ultimately beyond even our cherished reason,
that love which unites us. (Adapt/SStock)

The candle is lit

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the Burramattagal people of the Darug Nation, the first inhabitants of this place, as the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to their ancient culture, their elders past and present and their emerging leaders. We acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area. We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on which we gather today.

OPENING SENTENCES

Eternal Love, your grace we praise
which shapes and comforts all our days,
evolves the world we know.
Let worship, symbols come of age
to help us read beneath the page
and test the status quo!

Renewing Love, in Jesus met
defying limitation yet
particular in all;
confronting still the edifice
of ignorance and prejudice,
responding to your call.

Amen.

(A hymn by David Stevenson 2010)

HYMN *"May God's Wisdom" (Tune: 'Stuttgart 87.87)*

1. May God's wisdom deep within us
Shape the joy within our hearts,
Smooth the road we travel gently
Using all our loving arts.

2. May fair blossoms dropping petals
On the living path we tread,
Make a cushioned, glorious carpet,
Fragrancing the way ahead.

3. May we root our dreams and longings
In a true integrity,
Clearing out all that will hinder
Love's own creativity.

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WORDS OF GRACE & CHANGE

O God of grace and mercy,
deepen our experience of your inclusive love for all;
we confess that inclusion does not seem natural to us.

The church through the ages tragically failed to see
what you are sharing in the Parable of the Wedding Party.
When Jesus used the image of a violent, murderous king,
to stress how intensely God feels about inclusion,
the church has taken this literally,
accepting that violence can be used to exclude others.

Jesus, it's a shameful thing
when you've sent invitations to all who will come
and we stand at the door and turn people away
finding personal, cultural and religious ways.
This to justify, in Your Name, the lines we draw between us:
the exclusions and suspicions,

the greeds and power-plays,
that harm the least,
and protect our special interests.

Gracious, merciful, inclusive God, we pray:
Lift us above our pettiness and self-protection,
and use us as Your agents of justice and mercy;

***May Your grace open our doors,
stretch out our arms
and turn our attention
to the excluded, rejected and neglected ones.***

May Your wisdom teach our minds, open our hearts
and challenge our apathy
to find solutions to the conflicts and self-created threats in our world.

***May Your love release our energies, ignite our abilities
and inspire our action
to heal those who carry the scars of abuse, war and disease,
to comfort those who grieve the loss of loved ones or opportunities,
to restore the ones who have failed or fallen,
to nurture the life that breaks out in every person
and every part of our planet.***

And make us heralds of Your kingdom
who extend Your invitation to all who will listen.

Amen

(Sources: Vladimir Korotkov & adapted: Sacredise)

SONG *Lead kindly light, Audrey Assad*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piUDbCtgyw>

1. Lead kindly Light, amidst the grey and gloom
The night is long and I am far from home
Here in the dark, I do not ask to see
The path ahead, one step enough for me
Lead on, lead on, kindly Light

2. I was not ever willing to be led
I could have stayed, but I ran instead
In spite of fear, I followed my pride
My eyes could see, but my heart was blind
Lead on, lead on, kindly Light

3. And in the night, when I was afraid
Your feet beside my own on the way
Each stumbling step where other men have trod
Shortens the road leading home to my God
Lead on, lead on
My God, my God
Lead on, lead on, kindly Light

SCRIPTURE READINGS **Matthew 22:1-14**

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The realm of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again 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.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those 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, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

RESPONSE

In these words God speaks to us!

May they come alive in our living! Amen!

REFLECTION

HYMN *As a fire is meant for burning (Tunes: TiS 217, or 152)*

1. As a fire is meant for burning
with a bright and warming flame,
so the church is meant for mission
giving glory to God's name
not to preach our creeds or customs
but to build a bridge of care
we join hands across the nations
finding neighbours everywhere.

2. We are learners we are teachers
we are pilgrims on the way
we are seekers we are givers
we are vessels made of clay
by our gentle loving actions
we would show that Christ is light
in a humble listening spirit
we would live to God's delight.

3. As a green bud in the springtime
is a sign of life renewed
so may we be signs of oneness
mid earth's peoples many hues
as a rainbow lights the heavens
when a storm is past and gone
may our lives reflect the radiance
of God's new and glorious dawn

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OFFERING

Receive and bless these gifts and our lives, O God,
which we offer in response to your love revealed so clearly in Jesus.
As he planted the seeds of love and life in our lives,
strengthen us to nourish others with the fruits
of our faith made visible through these gifts,
our love and our witness.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A PRAYER FOR PEACE IN ISRAEL & PALESTINE

*"They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain..." —Isaiah 11:9*

God of Comfort,

send your Spirit to encompass all those whose lives
are torn apart by violence and death in Israel and Palestine.
You are the Advocate of the oppressed
and the One whose eye is on the sparrow.
Let arms reach out in healing, rather than aggression.
Let hearts mourn rather than militarize.

God of Justice,

give strength to those whose long work for a just peace
might seem fruitless now. Strengthen their resolve.
Do not let them feel alone. Show us how to support their work
and bolster their courage. Guide religious leaders to model
unity and reconciliation across lines of division.
Guide political leaders to listen with their hearts as they seek peace & pursue it.
Help all people choose the rigorous path of just peace and disavow violence.

God of Love,

we lift up Palestine and Israel — its people, its land, its creatures.
War is a monster that consumes everything in its path.
Peace is a gift shared at meals of memory with Christians, Muslims, and Jews.
Let us burn incense, not children. Let us break bread, not bodies.
Let us plant olive groves, not cemeteries.
We beg for love and compassion to prevail
on all your holy mountains.

God of Hope,

we lift up the cities of the region: Gaza City and Tel Aviv,
Ramallah and Ashkelon, Deir El Balah and Sderot,
so long divided, yet so filled with life and creativity.
Come again to breathe peace on your peoples
that all may recognize you.

God of Mercy,

even now work on the hearts of combatants
to choose life over death, reconciliation over retaliation,
restoration over destruction. Help us resist antisemitism in all its forms,
especially in our own churches. All people, Israelis and Palestinians,
deserve to live in peace and unafraid, with a right to determine
their future together.

God of the Nations,

let not one more child or elder be sacrificed on altars of political expediency.
Keep safe all people from unjust leaders who would exploit
vulnerability for their own distorted ends.
Give wise discernment to those making decisions to pursue peace.
Provide them insight into fostering well-being, freedom, and thriving for all.
Teach all of us to resolve injustices with righteousness, not rockets.
Guard our hearts against retaliation, and give us hearts for love alone.

*Strengthen our faith in you, O God of All Flesh,
even when we don't have clear answers,
so that we may still offer ourselves nonviolently
for the cause of peace.
Amen.*

Rose Marie Berger, a senior editor of Sojourners magazine.

HYMN “Christ be my leader”, (TiS 624)

1. Christ be my leader by night as by day;
safe through the darkness, for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

2 Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him, though shifting as sand,

doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

3 Christ be my leader in calm as in strife;
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain
can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

Timothy Dudley-Smith, 1926- With permission One License A6044575 All rights reserved

BLESSING

The love of the faithful Creator,
The peace of the wounded Healer,
The joy of the challenging Spirit,
The hope of the Three-in-One
surround and encourage us
today, tonight, and forever.
May the blessing of God – the Creator, the Healer,
and the Spirit, be with us and remain with us always.
Amen.

(Source: The pattern of our days – Iona)

SONG *Come as you are (TiS 693)*

Come as you are, that's how I want you.
Come as you are, feel quite at home.
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven
Come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits.
No need to fear, love never end.
Don't run away, shamed, and disheartened.
Rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call strugglers, not just the virtuous.
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise

Why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you.

Come as you are, trust me again.

Nothing can change the love that I bear you.

All will be well, just come as you are.

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