



*To serve God and be cheerful* is the motto for today. This was also the personal motto of Bp. John Hacket, the 17<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Lichfield and Coventry and favorite of King Charles II. Poor Bp. Hacket's ministry stretched from his being appointed chaplain to King James I, to keeping his head during the English Civil War, and the overthrow and execution of King Charles I. He survived the tyrannical government of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, which sought to destroy the Church of England. He was rewarded for his faithfulness during the reign of Charles II and was made the Bishop of a ruined cathedral, over which he saw the unenviable task of restoration. With all of this in mind, Bp. Hacket's personal motto *To serve God and be cheerful* is quite inspiring. It is a good reminder for us as we focus on our Christian Duty and renewal in these last few weeks of Trinity season.

Our Christian Duty, our service to God in cheerfulness, is easy enough to see in the Old Testament Lesson, which encourages us to be joyful about our Father's business. I bet we will not forget that line *a live dog is better than a dead lion*. But the lesson rings true, *eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works...live joyfully...and whatever you [are called] to do, do it with all your might*. And we are reminded of why we can live joyfully and serve God cheerfully regardless of our circumstances in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. *The Lord is our shepherd who provides and we shall not want*. The Lord is the Good Shepherd who cares for us because He has a vested interest in us. And far better than *preparing tables for us before us in the presence of our enemies*, is the promise that *surely goodness and mercy shall follow [us] all the days of [our] life, and [we] shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever*. That is, if we continue to allow ourselves to be shepherded by Him.

But the rubber meets the road in the Epistle. Serve God and be cheerful, by being *careful about how we walk* in this world. We are to be cheerful, not foolish. We must be as *wise as serpents and as innocent as doves*. We are called to *redeem the time*. One Anglican theologian, writing twelve years before the first World War writes, *We have fallen on evil days, and it is our duty to make them better. We are therefore to redeem the time, or, more accurately, to buy up the opportunity at any expense of effort and self-denial. Everything is so against us that we must make the most of every passing help, influence, and means of grace...we must be alive to every opportunity for doing good. We must endeavor to discover the will of God*

*and act upon it, avoiding the folly of ignorance and the greater folly of disobedience.* This day and age call for no less. We have no hope of redeeming these days, nor of serving God in cheerfulness without being filled with the Holy Spirit. We are not *to be drunk with wine* but *filled with the wine of heaven*. And with this heavenly wine comes true joy. It will fill our hearts with the melody of heaven and overflow into a life of gratitude.

We might wonder though where is the cheerful service to God to be found in the Gospel Parable? We heard it with our own ears, there was a Royal wedding and instead of everyone obsessed with the television specials and the grocery store tabloids, the King was insulted, the messengers killed, villages burned, and one guest was apparently thrown out of the reception and straight into hell! In all seriousness this is one of the Lord's parables that people find the most confusing and offensive. This is because this is a parable that challenges us to look deeper.

This parable is very similar to the parable of the Great Supper (S. Luke xiv. 16), which we heard for the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Trinity. There is much in common between the two parables, but there is a degree of difference. The Parable of the Great Supper illustrates our response to the loving invitation of God, this parable, of the marriage of the King's Son, is about God's call for us to rejoice. The King, God Himself, prepares a great feast, with an abundance of food, enough to feed several villages seeks the joyful attendance of His people. But instead of serving the King through joyfully attending His feast, his subjects are ungrateful. They had already responded to the invitation and made their reservations, the food had been prepared for them, but when the message is given to come for all is ready, they ignore the messenger and go home. There was the sin of ingratitude, which led to the deeper sin of rebellion by killing the King's messengers, the penalty of which was the burning of their city.

The King has prepared a great feast though, and His honor is at stake, there is too much food, too much good wine to let go to waste, so He opens the feast to any who will come. He sends His messengers out into the highways to bring in all men, both bad and good. Both bad and good receive the invitation to come to the King's wedding feast, to enjoy all the good things the King had to offer, even to receive a beautiful and costly wedding garment to wear. But one guest refused to be joyful, refused to be grateful and obedient, and added further insult to injury by refusing to wear a wedding garment, which earns him the reward of being cast into outer darkness. The guest knew what he was doing, when he was asked *why he did not wear his wedding garment*, he was speechless. He had laid it aside on purpose, he

made a conscious choice to ignore the light and joy of the Lord that he had been invited and welcomed into.

The invitation to the King's wedding feast was a call to happiness, and to enter the joys of their Lord. The same disobedience and rebellion which made others refuse to come to the wedding feast and rejoice, made this last guest, though present at the feast, to be unfit. The garment of renewal offered in Christ, was rejected. This parable teaches us that if any are cast into the outer darkness it will be because they will not put on the new man. It teaches us that if we miss the joy of service, it is because we will not serve. Fr. Austin Farrer makes this even more personal to us, he writes, *We are the men whom God's mercy has brought to his table, and the garment of glory is bestowed on us by his royal hand: 'Put ye on' says the scripture 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. We come here to keep our holy feast as members of Christ's body; in making us his members Christ spreads the garment of his own sanctity upon us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to receive us as though we were Christ himself. Amen.*