

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 11th October 2020



Dear Friends,

'Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!' (Philippians 4: 4)

There are a number of events which mark out the generations in our recent history. Where were you when

- When the first doodlebug fell on London (13 June 1944);
- When Kennedy was shot (22nd November 1963)
- When Elvis died at his home in Memphis, Tennessee (16th Aug 1977)
- When Mandela was released from prison after 27 years (11th February 1990)
- When Princess Diana died in Paris (31st Aug 1997)
- When the Twin Towers were hit (11th September 2001)

This week heralds the 30th anniversary of *Mauerfall* - the fall of the Berlin Wall. From its construction in August 1961 until its demolition on 9th November 1989, the Berlin Wall did more than separate West Germany from the East, also known as the DDR. It symbolised a deep-rooted hatred, an insurmountable division between people that directly led to the deaths of at least 139 people who dared to try and cross it.

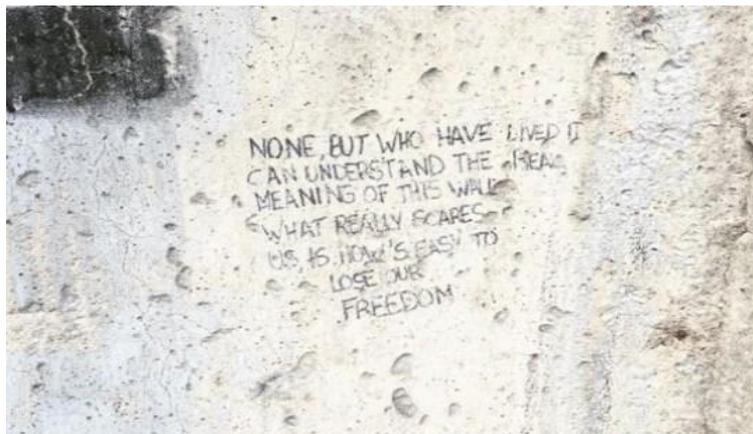


East Berliners scaling the wall - Getty Images

Its momentous demolition was a pivotal event in world history and marked both the fall of the Iron Curtain and the beginning of the end of communism in Eastern Europe. An end to the Cold War was declared at the Malta Summit three weeks later, and the reunification of Germany took place in October the following year.

The wall's ruins became a symbol of hope and a warning to people of the future. One euphoric Berliner interviewed by the BBC as the wall fell around him declared: *'It's a bit like Christmas and Pentecost all come together!'*

That wondrous night, I remember watching the live footage from my home in London with an equal sense of euphoric wonder and hope. Rod and I had met in Berlin two years beforehand, and as we watched the Wall fall, we were caught up in the reminiscence of our experience of waiting nervously at Checkpoint Charlie to visit the East. On that momentous night, we had also just discovered that I was pregnant with our first child. So, our hearts were full with rejoicing – filled with joy in the Lord, for ourselves and the new life with which we had been blessed; for the people of East and West Berlin; and for the hopes and dreams of a brave new world renewed with the promise of Jesus' kingdom of unconditional love. As that faithful Berliner had so eloquently exclaimed, it felt like Christmas and Pentecost had indeed all come together!!



'A Warning For Us All' - Getty Images

As we draw to the end of Ordinary time in our Universal Church calendar, the events of the fall of the Berlin Wall serve to remind us that there is no such thing as Ordinary Time in Jesus' kingdom! Everything is extraordinary and everything is a blessing in the grace of God our Father. Yet how fragile our human understanding of the gift of His grace. The message carved onto the Berlin Wall in the image above reads:

*None, but who have lived it, can understand the real meaning of this wall.
What really scares us is how easy it is to lose our freedom.*

As Christians in our fragile world, tasked with the rejection of earthly and sinful values which work to erect the walls of greed, power, wealth and slavery around a few at the cost of so many suffering souls, we ought to be mindful of the true extent of the freedom we stand to lose in turning a blind eye to the existence of that wall, and every other wall – symbolic or physical, which serves to separate and elevate an elite few at the cost to countless vulnerable and persecuted political and economic victims.

When we reflect upon Jesus' parable of the Wedding Banquet and its meaning for our modern world, it is helpful to first understand some of the cultural expectations of the time. For one thing, guests would have expected two invitations to a wedding banquet: the first to ask the guests to attend, and a second to let the guests know that the party was ready. It was also customary for invited guests to receive wedding clothes to wear to the banquet. (If you can imagine the logistics of doing all that on top of providing the banquet itself, you can begin to see why two invitations were issued!) It was *unthinkable* for the guests to refuse to wear the wedding clothes that they had received – it would have been a huge insult to the hosts, leading them to think the guests did not want to take part in the wedding celebration!!



'The Marriage Feast' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

In this parable, God is the King, Jesus is His Son. And the kingdom of heaven is a wedding feast. It is a joyful celebration thrown by the Father for His Son. Here is the meaning of life according to the bible: The Father loves His Son Jesus, and invites the world to enjoy Jesus Christ with Him. In Jesus' story, the King invited his guests *three* times, and each time the guests rejected his invitation.

The wedding clothes represent the righteousness needed to enter God's Kingdom; Christ himself has provided these clothes of righteousness for everyone, yet each of us must *choose* to wear them in order to gain entry to God's sumptuous banquet that is eternal life! Jesus has given each of us an open invitation to the banquet that God has prepared, but we must be ready and properly prepared. How easy it is to read the bible and not think about how to live differently. How easy it is to debate what a passage means without putting that meaning into practice. Our message today is clear: exposure to God's word is not enough – it must lead to obedience!

When the King tells us that *'All is ready,'* Jesus is pointing us to His resurrection from the dead. Jesus is showing us how our world is so full of greed and self-interest that, even when the Son of God comes to earth to set us free from the sins which bind us, we are too self-absorbed to receive His invitation to live in and through His unconditional love.



'Parable of the Banquet' Artist unknown

Paul reminds us where our focus should be: (Philippians 4: 8-9)

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

He writes to the Philippian church on this matter; encouraging them to rejoice in the saving work of Jesus, yet also warning them against falling into the trap of complacency – assuming that once they had found faith in Christ they could relax! Far from it, warns Paul. To serve Jesus is to take on a new way of thinking; to live in harmony with one another and to work hard at fixing our thoughts on what is true and honourable and right. Paul encourages us to *keep* putting into practice the ways of Jesus – and to ask Him through prayer for help through the trials and tribulations of living in a modern world full of deceit and opportunities to turn away from God's truth.

Paul reminds us to be clear where to look for peace from our worries. Real peace is not to be found in this world – rather it comes from continually developing our relationship with Jesus. Trusting in Him and learning to pray all our worries of families,

friends, work or health and more into His care allows us to let God's peace guard our hearts against anxiety and stress.

The promise of *Mauerfall* was the opportunity for our world to right the wrongs of the past and work for a new world order which centred on freedom, equality and justice for all. How quickly we have built up other walls to replace it instead.



'The Parable of the Wedding Feast' by Frans Francken II

Similarly, the promise of God's invitation to His banquet is an opportunity for us to choose eternal life by our obedience to living this earthly life in and through Jesus' teachings and example. God longs for us to attend His banquet in heaven – that's why He invites us again and again and again – all He asks is that we *choose* to respond in faithful obedience to Jesus' loving call on our lives. The gift of God's love, grace, forgiveness is free. The wedding clothes are free – even the food at the banquet is free. The invitation has arrived. How will you respond?

Yours, rejoicing in the joy of the Lord,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

Schedule of Services for October 2020

Our churches are open for regular prayer and for Sunday services - please see our website for more details at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

All seats at our services need to be booked in advance. Please see the table below and book your seats by either calling or emailing the **Benefice Office** on **(01962) 880845** or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
11 th Oct		8am – BCP Holy Communion	10am – Harvest Service	10am - Harvest Service	4pm - Evening Prayer
18 th Oct	4pm - Evening Prayer		10am – Holy Communion		
25 th Oct	10am - Holy Communion	10am - 4th Sunday Worship			



Collect Prayer for the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us your gift of faith that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before, we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Philippians 4:1-9 – Rejoice in the Freedom of Christ!

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22: 1-14 - Parable of the Great Feast

Jesus also told them other parables. He said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come! So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!' But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.

The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. And he said to his servants: 'The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honour. Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.' So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.'