

Prepared Sermon on Sunday 11 October 2026 (Pentecost 20)

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The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”(Matthew 22:8-9)

None of us cannot be in two places at once. Have you ever been trapped into this? I have. Being a priest, I cannot accept some friendly invitations on Sunday morning such as friend's birthday party, because my priority on Sunday morning is to lead church services. (Unless I am on leave!) But if I receive a phone call, a letter, or text/e-mail message of invitation to the events held during the week, I need to look at my daily to find out whether I am available or not. In the past, I responded to these without checking daily, and was caught in the trap of double booking. You can understand how embarrassing it would be when I realised that I already have something 'booked in.'

It is a matter of choice, priority, and commitment. When we are asked to commit ourselves in several different important activities, how shall we prioritise one above others? All of those events appear to be important, and you would not like to miss out any of them. Unless something comes as life-threatening, we might struggle to choose our priority of commitment.

Usually, I do not draw pictures from my own personal experiences in sermon, but this time, please allow me to do so. I can tell you easy one and difficult one that I experienced. Let's have a look at the easy one first. Every year on Christmas Day, my friends invites me to their home for Christmas dinner. Being a bachelor, it is so wonderful to be invited to someone's home to share the joy of Christmas. When I start receiving invitations, I always tell them the time suitable for me. Then I set my timetable. 'Willows at 12 noon, Jim's at 4 pm, then 7 pm at Alph's,...' What a Christmas dinner hopping!

Indeed, all of these people are precious to me, and my priority of commitment is equal. There would not be any difficulties to choose all of these, by setting different time of appointment. (Thus, I would not worry about appearing in several different places at once.)

Now, the hard case. This is a true story which happened to me on the Easter week this year.

After survived the Holy Week and Easter Sunday, I was going to baptise a baby on the second Sunday of Easter. Early morning on Friday (only three days before the day of baptism) I received a phone call from my haematologist in Sydney. He just told me that I must be admitted to St. Vincent Hospital in Sydney, ASAP! 'Why?' I asked him.

I was feeling quite alright, did not understand why he is pushing me. I also asked him whether I will be put to the local hospital in stead going to Sydney.

However, he simply said to me that this is a medical emergency, though he did not explained to me what's going on. He told me that he is contacting the ambulance for my transport. I was trying to explain to him about the baptism, and other matters in the parish that makes the whole things so difficult. But he did not compromise, persisting me to come to Sydney quick as possible. After hung up, of cause I panicked. I rang Bishop Donald and explained him in details what's going on. Bishop was absolutely helpful, by looking around and found a relieving priest. (I should also mention about Fr. Stephen Davis who baptised a baby on my behalf.) Making a long story a short, I was told by my GP at the local hospital what exactly happened before I was airlifted to Sydney via Griffith. I spent nine days before discharged.

Reflecting this, let us ask ourselves again about the way how we prioritise our commitment. In this case medical treatment took my priority over baptism. As a priest, I did not like to miss out the great Easter season's opportunity to baptise someone. In fact, I was attempting to change the mind of my haematologist, but couldn't do so. He was seeing my priority is to receive treatment, to be freed from any serious life-threatening risk. Was I self-centred when I made my decision to respond to him? No. In stead of doing everything for the church by myself, I decided to rely on the others, especially Bishop Donald, Fr. Stephen, and my church wardens and parishioners for this baptism. Thus the priority of baptism and other matters on ministry in the parish were fulfilled without me.

Jesus continues to challenge the leaders of the Temple. This time, he questions about their response to God's invitation to his kingdom. Like this parable, we often choose something else other than God's invitation to our priority of commitment. In this parable, some people made light of it, and prioritised their own things, farming, business, etc. (In our Australian reality, we rarely decline the invitation to the wedding, but the Jewish culture and practise in the first century was different from our way.)

Aren't we so often talk about declining of congregations? And we say that the value and paradigm of today's culture has been changed to what it used to be. A good old family practise on Sunday morning - dress up nicely to go to church, then having a roast dinner, are gone. I am not over criticising the cultural trend to today, such as 'the family first' but feel sympathy to this king who kept receiving apologies from those he invited.

Do you think Jesus is speaking this parable to blame our friends who do not come to the church on Sunday morning? No he doesn't! As he spoke to the leaders of the Temple, he is challenging to their attitude of being exclusive and arrogant. They refused to acknowledge Jesus' divinity, and continued to maintain their power and supremacy over all other people. In doing so, their priority of whatever commitment is for their benefit not for the others. Some of them behaved inappropriately by abusing their authority (like the one person who did not stick with the dress code of this banquet) because they set their rules over law and prophets.

Finally, Jesus told them 'For many are called, but few are chosen.'(Matt. 22:14)

God fully understands us when we cannot respond to his calling, provided that we sincerely pray to him, asking his forgiveness. But to those who remain arrogant, he will never choose them. So, let us be always aware that our way to set a priority of commitment must be genuine and honest, based on our faith in him.