

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's selection of readings express themes of collegiality among the followers of Christ, of forgiveness, of generosity – but not without a reminder of the authority of God overriding human drives and desires. This Sunday gives us an opportunity to look at what has gone before and what lies ahead, with an assurance that in the present moment we are held secure by God's love and grace.

What a year we have been through so far as a community of like-minded people who call St Luke's our spiritual home. We could so easily have lost our way if not for the work we have done together to establish our focus in our vision and mission. Thanks be to God for the hard work of many of you which has stabilised us and pulled us back from the vortex of decline that nips at the toes of all the Anglican churches in this diocese of Adelaide. Whilst numerically we might not be strong, and in fact have suffered attrition more than usual this year, I hope that spiritually and in morale we are held together reasonably well.

It is nonetheless still so easy to drift away from our purpose, become overwhelmed in the day to day matters and lose sight of what unites us, of what to do next. I hesitate to use the language of 'roadmap' or 'recovery' because these terms have been taken over in their relationship to pandemic and virus, economy and any other number of terms most people have become tired of hearing over and over in the media, to the point that the breadth of meaning of 'roadmap' or 'recovery' is significantly diminished. However, it is a roadmap that we are already following, paved by Christ himself that is showing us the way forward. And it is recovery that we must achieve, not just in financial terms, but more importantly in earning again our place in the wider community.

We were working toward both these points of recovery before the churches were closed for three months, and we were following the roadmap long before state

premiers started claiming the term for their plan to emerge from the economic famine resulting from the closure of so many business.

It is time now, at this end of 2020 to muscle ourselves up for the next stage of mobilising the church into its next era. Rather than seeing ourselves lucky to stay afloat during the pandemic and being grateful to just do the things we are used to doing in church, we must keep praying fervently for God to shape our vision, and then, when God hears our prayers, to fearlessly walk through the doors he opens before us. Neither should we assume that church or society are over all this yet. Despite more and more good news, even that we may sing again in church, we need to be well prepared to weather whatever the next roadblock will be along the map of God's design.

The people of Israel lost their way at Horeb, turning from the distant goal of the promised land to what they imagined was the immediate gratification of the idol, the false god to whom they sacrificed and named the saviour from bondage in Egypt. Was it days or generations that Moses remained on the mountain with God? Were the people insecure in faith and so dependent on being led by the hand of Moses that they so easily forgot the Lord their God?

Moses could have let Israel burn and just as easily taken to himself the Lord's promise to make him a great nation but instead he risked God's wrath, urging God, exposing the dominant compassion and mercy of God, and saving the people from destruction. Through Moses' commitment to the end goal we learn of deep forgiveness, even when they forsook him as their leader, even when the people built an idol. God forgave the people and they were given another chance to move along the way.

It's important for us not to be distracted as a church community, as the people of Israel were distracted, by the many things that call to us from each side, the anxieties and urgencies of the current situation, changing priorities in our private

lives and the demands of the world. We are called to collegiality and togetherness by the witness of the Bible. St Paul urges us, as he did to the little Christian community in Philippi, to be of the same mind in the Lord, to stand firm in the Lord. Our gathering as a community of faithful believers at St Luke's is a space for mutual spiritual strengthening, for the upbuilding of each other in the work of the gospel, in the mission to which we are called in this local community of Modbury. The assurance is spelled out clearly in Paul's letter in that most beautiful of passages: 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

Collegiality and forgiveness lead to generosity, an aspect of God's nature which can be drawn from the gospel reading. This parable of the wedding feast is frequently interpreted as the judgement of God coming harshly on those who do not conform. If we look for the generosity of God however, we can see that it rests alongside the forgiveness – the invited wedding guests made excuses and refused to come to the celebration of the marriage of the son. They mistreated and killed the slaves of the king. The son in Jesus' parables is almost always a reference to himself. God is the king who punished those who mistreated his slaves. This is the reminder of the authority of God which is expressed in terms the people who heard this parable spoken would have identified with and understood.

Sometimes we can forget that God has ultimate authority and that forgiveness and grace are only his to give and we cannot take them for ourselves. Still not giving up on the people who might celebrate with his son, the king called for those in wider places, in the streets where the ordinary people lived and worked. God's generosity spans the places where we do not always go. Perhaps we might

liken the main streets in the parable to the local places in the community surrounding our church. Now more than ever do people need to hear a word of hope and assurance from the Son of God. Many are invited and they may not come. Or maybe they will come if we affirm for them that the Son may be found in unexpected places, and that in him there is forgiveness, compassion and mercy. Not everyone will come to the banquet with the best intentions. Perhaps these are the ones without a wedding robe – but that should be for another sermon.

For now, let us hold steadfast to the Son who promises a celebration, a banquet of the good things that come from God. Let us recall from where we have come, from worshipping the calf at Horeb to the trials of promoting the gospel in Philippi to the main streets of the city in the company of every type of human being. And through all this journey of faith and faithlessness we find forgiveness, togetherness and generosity all given from God. May we be encouraged as were the Philippians by the assurances of God and be confident to move forward along the roadmap laid before us by the Lord.