Ordinary 29 Ex 32;1-14 Phil **Matt 22:9-15** **Scott MALCOLM**

Martine and Philippa are sisters in a small Norwegian fishing village. Daughters of a very pious but long dead, Lutheran Pastor. Every anniversary his tiny congregation gather to remember and celebrate his work.

They are a strict group. No expensive or bright clothes, extravagant meals or bottles of wine. No singing, dancing or frivolity. These are serious people. Hardworking, no nonsense, sensible people. These are upright, devoted, and religious, people. They honour their dead Pastor and work hard at that.

In to this serious, strict and religious place comes Babette; who is not Norwegian, not Lutheran, not serious. She is French, Catholic, and a refuge. She becomes Martine and Philippa’s servant. In her time with the sisters Babette wins a lottery and instead of using the winnings for herself, she secretly decides to spend it all, putting on a feast for the sisters and disciples of the long dead Pastor. So, with wondrous abandon she cooks and cleans and buys and bakes and gets everything ready. She does it in the only way she knows how, with flair and colour and magic.

The big day comes, the congregation gather for the anniversary, and they are greeted with this gift. This overwhelming, extravagant, luxurious feast.

It is everything they have worked all their lives to avoid.

It is expensive, and lavish, it is not sensible. There is not just wine but fine French champagne, there is not just food, but exquisite French cuisine. It is not drab or dull or tight and controlled. It is colourful, vibrant and full of life. This is the gift that Babette has prepared for them, for their pleasure and enjoyment, in their honour, and that of their loved Pastor.

As they gather, they are faced with a choice, they can choose to let go of all that they have worked at over these years. All their hard won, hard-fought moral stances on lavish food and wine. Their unspoken pride in living their strict rigorous code in honour of their faith and their Pastor… and sit, eat and drink … or they can walk away.

They can accept this gift from someone not like themselves, someone they may think is less than them. A servant, a Catholic, a refugee. They are faced with a choice about whether they are going to hold on to their visions of what it means to be faithful, good and pious. What it means to be religious and God fearing… they can sit, eat and drink or they can walk away.

They are faced with this challenge, these choices, this moment, where everything that they have believed and staked their religious lives on seems to be laid bare and up for grabs. Do they accept this gift as from the God who loves and cares for them, or reject it, as a work of the devil which seeks to subvert and led them astray? They can sit and eat and drink, or they can walk away.

As Jesus moves through Judea, the region beyond the Jordan in the gospel of Matthew, he also offers a feast that unsettles established realities, challenges what people and things stand for, seemingly overturning all of that hard work, effort and toil in being good, and right before God.

He, too, by this feast offers up a gift for these righteous, pious, devoted, holy, strict, and serious men. They too have a choice. They can sit and eat and drink, or they can walk away?

The questions asked of the small Norwegian Christian congregation are the same as those asked of the Pharisees as they see and hear and observe Jesus wondering in the region beyond the Jordan. A choice where everything they have believed and staked their religious lives on is laid bare and up for grabs. What will they do? What will the sisters and their friends do?

These questions are asked of all people by the Jesus of the gospels, but especially of religious people. What will the Pharisees do? What will the sisters do? What will we do?

In the text, we are told that the Pharisees seek to entrap him, test him, they conspire against him, they are filled with malice and enraged by him. Eventually, they will kill him.

They make their choice, it is one for sticking with what they know, what they have invested their time and energy, will and effort in to. It is one for holding ever more tightly to the control of life they have had. Control over what they eat and drink, over who they eat and drink with, control over how their lives will be lived and with whom, faced with Babette’s feast, they not only turn and walk away, but plot to kill her for her trouble.

What will the sisters and their little congregation do? What will we do, when this gospel Jesus shakes our long-held securities about what is right and wrong, who is in and out, about what is holy and profane, sacred and secular, righteous and not righteous?

About all we have held dear and worked for.

Will we sit, eat and drink … or will we walk away ….

Thanks be to God.