Offer God's open invitation to Jesus

Who sang *School's Out*? Yes—Alice Cooper. Many people know Alice Cooper as the wild rock star who battled alcoholism, drugs and a destructive lifestyle. Fewer people know that today Alice Cooper is a committed Christian. However, it took several invitations to explore Jesus more fully before Alice Cooper said 'yes'. He said that Jesus satisfied the deepest hunger of his heart that he was looking for in destructive living. God had an **'Open Invitation'** to Alice Cooper. But it was his wife and friends who constantly **offered God's open invitation**.

Research over many years has shown that most practising Christians first came to church because someone personally invited them.

A 2022 Barna study found that about one in three non-Christians would say yes to come to church if invited by someone they trust.

The readings today proclaim the truth that:

In Jesus, God's invitation is open.

And that He is calling you to:

Offer God's open invitation to Jesus

Exiled - Isaiah: "Come, everyone who thirsts... though you have no money, come."

Isaiah was speaking to the people of Israel who were in exile in Babylon. The exiled people of Israel felt far from God, guilty, ashamed. They were thirsting to go back to Israel, to God, but thought there was no way back. They felt they had nothing to offer.

God's words to them were: "Come."

In a similar way, maybe you, or someone you know, feels far from God: Guilty. Ashamed. Done too many bad things. You have little/no faith.

God's word is: "Come."

We are starting our 7th season of alpha on Sunday 20th September. Is God calling you to "Come"?

Or who might God be calling you to invite?

Take 5 Alpha invitation leaflets at the back of church.

Invite your favourite non-churchgoers to try alpha.

They may say 'no'. They may try it for a few weeks and it's not for them. That's fine.

The important thing is that you **offer God's open invitation** to those outside the church. To those in **exile**.

Sin and suffer - Romans: "Nothing … will … separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." St Paul wrote to Christians in Rome suffering in their faith.

Perhaps you are suffering in your faith: You've been rejected because you're a Christian. You're going through a very heavy challenge. Perhaps you've fallen into the same sin again.

You feel God has withdrawn His love.

However, a loving parent doesn't stop loving a baby with a dirty nappy, doesn't stop comforting a child in pain, forgives a child's mistakes.

Similarly, nothing you do can make God stop loving you any more or any less than He already does.

That doesn't mean that everything you do or suffer gives God or you joy.

Nothing can separate you from God's love in Jesus.

Offer God's open invitation to those who struggle with **sin and suffering**.

All - Matthew: "they **all** ate and were satisfied." All people came to Jesus. All had different needs. Some wanted healing. Some hope. Some food.

All people are hungry for different things today.

Some need greater meaning and purpose, community, love, reconciliation with family, financial security, healing from health problems, healing from grief, and peace of mind in mental health challenges.

If this is you, invite Jesus into your life even more.

If you have a non-churchgoing friend who is spiritually hungry and curious about Jesus, **offer God's open invitation**.

God satisfies **ALL** people in a relationship with Jesus.

School may be out for summer.

But God has an **open invitation:**

1. to those who are exiled from the church

2. to sinners and those who are suffering
3. to satisfy all people's desires.

God needs you to **offer His open invitation** to them.

Now - Jesus didn't instruct the disciples to feed the crowd next week, next day, or in a few hours. He instructed them to feed the crowds **NOW!**

Like the disciples, you may not feel you have the resources to invite.

Do not wait to invite Jesus into your heart.

Do not wait to invite your favourite non-churchgoers to explore Jesus.

God has the resources.

All you need to do is trust.

The time to invite is **now**.

Prayer

Jesus, you said you stand at the door of my heart and knock to come in.

You promise that whoever opens the door you will come in and eat.

Jesus, I invite you to come into my heart.

Come to the parts of me that feel exiled from you.

Never let any sin or suffering come between me and God's love.

Satisfy all people's deepest desires.

Help me to **offer your open invitation** to others.

In Jesus' name, amen!