

Sermon 2023 10 15 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

The parable in the Gospel today may well be called the wedding planner's nightmare – well – least part of it is.

The marriage of the happy couple appears to have gone without a hitch. It is the wedding reception, the banquet, which appears to be causing problems.

The father of the groom has sent out invitations to literally everyone he knows.

The banquet is set, and the father send servants to remind people to turn up.

But, it would appear, every person who has been invited, now refuses to come to the banquet.

At this point, the father King, is upset to a certain degree, but decides to give people a second chance to come to the wedding.

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Again, he sends servants to remind every person to turn up. But those who are invited do not seem to care very much about the King, or his feelings, or the couple or their feelings, or even the opportunity of a free and sumptuous meal.

And the responses are quite horrible. "... they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them."

So the people have been invited, and now informed a second time that the feast is ready but treat the invitation with total contempt.

They make light of the invitation. "Sorry, I have to do something else." So, some go off to attend to matters at their farm or business. But universally, they treat the King's slaves with utter contempt, and kill them.

This is a terrible reflection of the respect the people hold for their king. Not only do they refuse his hospitality, but they also hold him in contempt and destroy the slaves that have cost him dearly.

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It is fairly safe to say that these are not Anglicans. An offer of food seems to bring us in in unprecedented numbers.

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But these people would seem to consider this king and his family so beneath their attention that refuse their hospitality, make light of their invitation and destroy the slaves of great value.

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By this point I feel great sadness for the king and his family. They are so sidelined by the community that they are considered irrelevant and subject to great ridicule, disgrace, and hatred.

I would simply say that no person, regardless of their station in life deserves such treatment.

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But some would say that the king overreacts by sending troops to destroy the city and the murders in it.

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The king makes one final attempt to make this banquet a thing of joy. So he sends his remaining servants out to gather in any who may be willing to come.

But this invitation is not just about the willingness to come. It is unsaid, but those who come need to make some effort to enter into the spirit of the occasion and make some preparation at least for the event.

It seems quite ruthless of the king to treat the man without a wedding gown in such a way. But we should hold that in tension, with the fact that the man has made no effort at all – it is too much even for him to put on a wedding garment to enter into the spirit of things.

He is willing to accept the benefit, but not bear any personal cost in being given free access to the feast.

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This parable makes a small, but poignant point about our salvation. It is that in our response there must be some recognition, some small gift, some moment of gratitude for the overt invitation to enter into eternal salvation.

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In the first part of the story, God create a perfect biosphere where every living creature and plant is set in perfect harmony. It is a space where humanity may live eternally. In this space they may live harmonious lives in perfect balance with their environment. But they, we, destroy this with a need to know the reality that exists beyond perfection.

And the reality that exists beyond perfection is a shattered biosphere and entry into a space of struggle and fear.

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But God so wants to sit in the fellowship of the table with us, that he sends his prophets to warn against a life of separation, and to give an image of that perfect place of feasting.

But the prophets are rejected and killed. Some are just annoying, but some manage to penetrate our defences to such a point that we must destroy them so that we may go on living these imperfect, painful, unfulfilling lives.

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But this too is not sufficiently painful for this God of infinite love to abandon us.

So he places his own Son in the midst of us to fully know us and to fully redeem us.

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But too many of us believe in the one-sided deal. God loves us. Jesus died on the cross to redeem us. We are welcome at the feast.

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But we forget the stinger -- the man at the wedding feast who could not be bothered to put on a wedding garment.

Accepting the invitation is not enough. Turning up at the banquet is not enough.

We need to enter into the joy and transforming moment of salvation. In this we are not expected to wear our best clothes, but there must be some indication that we have changed; and there must be actual change.

We do not turn up at the wedding feast or at the meal of remembrance simply because we have received an invitation.

We come because we are changed by the invitation and we are further changed by the meal of remembrance and celebration. We do not just wander in happy to receive a free meal.

We must react to the honour of a place at the table. There must be change so evident in us that we want to enter into the festivities with a fulness of spirit.

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For the sacrifice of Christ has changed us. We are no longer people who are wandering by. We have become the people of formal invitation. We are the ones desired above all others to be the first recipients of the invitation. We must never carry that lightly.

We must dress for the occasion, prepare ourselves physically and mentally for the occasion.

We are no longer rent-a-crowd invited in because there are a few empty seats.

If our response is from the heart; if our willingness to be present is motivated by love; and if that love is not just for ourselves, but for God and for the rest of those present, then the simple meal of bread and wine becomes a great feast sufficient for eternity.

If we hold four things:-

- The love we hold for ourselves;
- The love we hold for others;
- The present love we hold for God; and
- The love we hold for God's generosity down through the ages;

Then bread and wine become the greatest feast sufficient to feed and fill us and all humanity.

Let us pray that our sisters and brothers who still stand on the highway, uncertain about whether they should accept this invitation or move on to another priority will find the need to share this meal so overwhelming that they put aside all other obligations and join us in the feast of the king.

Let us eat well on these simplest of foods. Amen

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