

**Mt 22:1 - 14 Parable of the Wedding Banquet
Rev. Susan Pickering**

Gathering of the People of God

Organ Prelude

Welcome & Notices

Centring Prayer

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

Processional Hymn: Trust & Obey

Light the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a reminder that Christ is the light of the world.

Call to Worship

Let us give thanks to God, for God is good
God's steadfast love endures forever

Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.
God's steadfast love endures forever

Let us gather as people of God
giving all thanks and praise to God.
We are gathered let us celebrate the steadfast love of God.

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that
is in them.

This land is Holy Ground

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians,
the Turrbal and Jagera people, elders, past, present and emerging
**We honour them for their custodianship of the land,
on which we gather today.**

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Introit "Lord I trust thee"

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession

God of love

We give thanks for the life you breathe into the universe.

For the freedom offered to us through Christ,

we give you all thanks and praise.

Christ called us into community with you, O God,

calling us to work together for justice, mercy and peace.

He called us to work out of a place of love.

We live in a world so diverse, so busy, so pre-occupied,

So self focused, the shadows begin to emerge,

And so we bring our confessions and call for you right to break through.

We live in a world that has standards, what's right, what's not, appropriate dress, not so appropriate dress, who's in, who's out, the standards are set. We live in a world where our lives and minds are so heavily influenced by media and marketing.

Forgive us God for the times that our judgements prevent us from engaging with people, for the times that our actions and words have been without love and without thought.

Forgive us for participating in systems, structures and social constructions that divide, exclude and oppress.

Forgive us for failing to acknowledge our participation in the hurt and pain of so many that have experienced pain and rejection in community and church.

Forgive us for the brokenness in society to which we contribute.

God, you are Love,

forgive us, renew us, send your Spirit to rest upon us,

May she fill us afresh with the energy and desire to love,

With the will and patience to act with wisdom.

May we live truly as your liberated people,

Welcoming all in the name of Christ.

Amen

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Words of Assurance

God turns from anger with mercy and love
Jesus Christ came among us in full humanness
offering forgiveness and life abundantly.
We are a liberated people, we are forgiven and loved.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: Bless the Lord my Soul (TiS 706)

Service of the Word

Readings

1st reading Philippians 4:1 - 9

2nd Reading Matthew 22:1 - 14

This is the Living Word

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Anthem “Psalm 23”

Message

So here we are, the 3rd parable in the series, this parable, like the others, continues within the context of intense debate between Jesus and the religious leaders over the nature and source of his authority. The first was fairly tame, the landowner and sons, last week we had the wicked tenants in the vineyard, this week the confrontation continues to ramp up as we engage a parable of a king and a wedding banquet for his son.

So in summary what we have is: King throws party for sons wedding, slaves go and call those invited, they don't come. So, some other slaves are sent to tell the invitees, 'look dinner's done, come on already.' As far as the invitees are concerned some were happier carrying on with their day others engaged in a bit of gratuitous violence. The King is not happy, portrayed as 'impatient and unforgiving to those who refuse the invitation,'¹ and enraged in fact, he engages in a bit of a military expedition, destroying the murderers and burning the city. Maybe he partook in a cup of tea because in the next breath we have a bit of 'keep calm, the party must go on' go and invite everyone you find. The slaves go and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad. The hall was filled with guests. But when the king

¹ Kittredge in feasting on the Gospels

Mt 22:1 - 14 Parable of the Wedding Banquet
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arrives he notices one guy not wearing a wedding robe, not happy he asks how did this happen, the guest left speechless! The king again engages in a little bit of banishment throwing him, bound into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If this is the kingdom it's a little confusing and confronting. We can't ignore the violence within the text, it goes against the non-violent nature and character of Jesus. The text could once more give way to justification of violence, we don't like the idea of judgement, it's too much and this ultimately seems like more of the same old, that said it's a reality. Lets' have a bit of a look at the context and violence within the text. The slaves that went out the second time were maltreated and killed - remember this is Jerusalem, Jesus was on the way to the cross, Jerusalem was notorious for killing prophets.

This gospel was written after the destruction of Jerusalem in around 70AD and it's suggested that 'burning the city' is reference to this destruction,² this destruction seen as God's judgement on the 'wicked guests who refused God's invitation,' is a familiar interpretation found in the Hebrew Scriptures, 'as well as in Josephus and Rabbinic literature.'³ It is following the two refusals and burning of the city that the invite becomes scandalously broad - the good and the bad.

The conclusion of the parable, well, banishment for wearing the wrong frock - we need to remember, first up there is no mentioned dress code and second that clothing is used as metaphor,⁴ the issue is much deeper. Overall we can't escape that in Matthew we encounter violent endings of parables and they do function as symbols of divine justice.⁵ What these violent inclusions must never be is mistaken for is models of behaviour for people of the Way.⁶

Social context, we need a bit of that to help us with interpretation. Weddings were a place for a family to show off their wealth for all to see, it was an opportunity to impress. The culture of the day, well hasn't changed, it's a very strong shame and honour culture reality being that in the ancient world, wealth equalled honour, clothing also served as a display of honour and worth, laying claims to certain roles

² Hare

³ Luz

⁴ Lewicki in Feasting on the Gospels

⁵ Brown in Feasting on the Gospels

⁶ Brown in Feasting on the Gospels

Mt 22:1 - 14 Parable of the Wedding Banquet
Rev. Susan Pickering

and status. The fact that this was the wedding of a king's son automatically implies a particular social and political importance.⁷

Now we know that Jesus is addressing the religious leaders of the day, those 'in the know' if you like and it would be much easier for us and every other reader to 'dismiss it as a message just for them, the religious establishment that rejected God's new word in Jesus.'⁸ Alas, this is, as we claim, 'the living word' and so we must engage.

In this parable we are hearing about people that have no time for the invite, they refuse to attend the king's banquet, who needs a king any way.⁹ Look around the world there are many places with Kings and Queens who rule, it's more of the same old, "I'm right, I have my like minded friends, my beliefs, I need no King' - this leaving us blind to what really rules us.

This parable challenges that perspective, it's calling and advocating for an open table, a new and alternative community. Sitting around a table and sharing a meal is 'the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships.'¹⁰ Even today we can see gatherings as a map of 'economic discrimination, social hierarchy and political differentiation.'¹¹ Jesus is saying no, that's not the way of the kingdom, in the kingdom all are invited and God continually offers the invite to the kingdom - the decision to take up the invitation is a free one, you chose to accept or decline. If we chose to accept we must consider what that 'wedding hall' looks like - filled with good and bad. Dining together would have had people reclining against each other, men and women, the pure and the unclean, tax collectors, prostitutes, wealthy and poor. In our context, and I'd like us to move beyond the idea of good and bad and just consider people and opinion, possibly who's in or who's out in our opinion, imagine pro-life and pro-choice, liberals and greens, refugee advocates and dissenters, couple who believe in traditional family and same gender couples, and the list could go on - God forbid this is a scene that social nightmares would've been made of! The easiest option is to go home and drink wine, discuss the weather, after all it's always a safe topic until climate change enters the conversation. Bottom line is that Jesus was well known for enjoying a good meal and a drink with people, we all know he had a bit of a reputation, a drunkard and a glutton willing to eat with friends and sinners.

⁷ Brown in Feasting on the Gospels

⁸ Polter in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

⁹ Hauerwas

¹⁰ Farb & Armelagos

¹¹ Crossan

Mt 22:1 - 14 Parable of the Wedding Banquet
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We must also consider the issue of dress codes, the judgement in the passage! I could don my alb each week, looking the part, but we're reminded it goes beyond external expression. We can wear our Sunday best for church and still refuse to turn back to God, refuse to be open to the transformation that God offers, because that calls us to change, think about it, it's like wearing your lycra gym gear to go for coffee, no intention of working out but looking the part, it's like bathing a fish, pointless, - our clothing, our external expression can become a facade. I stand wearing a clergy collar as a sign of my ordination and pants you possibly would rather not be seen in, I've been challenged about my tattoos, yet my arm declares my hope, let justice roll down like waters, the words of the prophet Amos. I, like each of you, hear the call to repentance and am challenged every single day.

Jesus didn't heal the blind and command them to continue living in darkness, he didn't forgive sins and say off you go - he healed the blind that they would see, he forgave sins and said sin no more, he declared your faith has set you free. Do we understand been cast out into the darkness as punishment of God or are people, once sent out, cast back into the darkness of their own making but refusing the invite to transformation?

As woman wisdom called out on the streets in Proverbs so the call of God continues to call out on the street, if we want to get to grips with what the Kingdom of God is we need to read and re-read the Sermon on the Mount. In relation to today's parable we need to understand that Jesus didn't just speak it, he lived it, fundamentally dangerous and radically challenging,¹² the call for an open table and this radical equality, the kingdom of God is more terrifying than anything else we could imagine.¹³

Prayer

Blessed be you Holy Mystery, for you continue to call to all people, inviting all to participate in the kingdom and the feast, offering an open table and calling for radical equality. Woman Wisdom we call on you to grant us the strength and commitment to accept the invite and toward for transformation in the broken world in which we live.

Hymn: Praise with Joy (TiS 179)

¹² Crossan

¹³ Crossan

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Sources

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