

Sunday Between 9th and 15th October [28]

Matthew 22:1-14

The gist of today's gospel story is easy enough to understand. A king sends out invitations, prepares a huge party, and then informs the invitees that it's time to come. The response is underwhelming, to say the least. In fact, they stay away in droves, making quite poor excuses. Undeterred, the host will not have an empty house, so he instructs his servants to invite others, good and bad. Of course, what this means is the people who had initially been excluded from the guest list. We can only assume there was a reason for this but the man is now so annoyed at those who turned their back on him that he wants every seat filled so that none of the original invitees will have a place.

So far, this parable is pretty easy to follow, the king is, of course, God. The original invitees are the Jews whom God prepared especially for this time. The servants sent out are the prophets who call them to the table, but by rejecting Christ Himself, they also rejected sitting at God's table. Lest you think that Jesus is being anti-Jewish with this allusion, He places us Gentiles even lower on the scale because we are the others, good and bad. The supper refers to the great judgement at the end of time when God will reward the righteous and the sinner. Around it our king regularly hands out forgiveness to His people and judgement to the rest. As such, it also includes the Supper we celebrate each Sunday around the Communion Table because God's banquet has already started, and God's church carries that out by drawing to it those who seek to respond to the invitation.

We seem to have depicted here two different levels of invitations. One level is that indicated by the first wave of invitees who refused to come to the party, and the host showed displeasure for that. The second level of invitations are those to the others and no requirements seemed to be placed on who was to be invited. This is really interesting, the servants are given no clue about who they are to bring in as guests at this banquet. The king offers no rules or regulations or any pre-requisites.

Then, we are told, the king comes to see the guests and the whole feel changes. No longer is this a parable saying that the Jewish leadership has got it wrong and everyone else is now in relationship with God. The parable describes the king being angry with guest who has arrived without wedding clothes. Now, remember a few moments ago, the servants brought people in with little notice to a wedding banquet and didn't tell them they needed to do anything in order to get in. However, the king makes the case that it is a wedding therefore, however you came to be invited, there is a particular ritual that goes with being a wedding guest and wearing wedding clothes is part of it.

Much like our understanding of grace, we have come to a place of grace entirely because of God, we never deserved our invitation, we didn't earn it or purchase it, but having understood what gift it is, we are necessarily transformed by it. We don't transform ourselves in order to hang onto grace, but rather, if we have really accepted God's grace, transformation is simply a reality of that new relationship. Just like the other guests were also late invitees, but having realised they were to attend a wedding, they prepared for it and behaved at it accordingly.

None of the guests in the parable, neither those originally invited, nor those who ultimately attended, had any intention of coming to this wedding. God invited many and varied people and expected them to honour the invitation. The wedding, while it was a "come as you are", was not a "stay as you are". To come to the banquet is to be changed. Those who, having taken up the invitation, are unable to truly take it on and be changed by it are at risk of not

being chosen.

Theologically, this means that in salvation, it is entirely God that does the work. We are completely passive. Our salvation does not depend upon our work, or initiative or lack thereof, our response, our faith, or anything that we do. It is entirely God's decision.

This is both good news and bad news. The bad news is that there is nothing we can do to get God's attention. If God does not decide for us, we have no hope. The good news is that by grace and the sacrifice of Jesus for us we have a standing invitation to God's great banquet and thus we have hope. God does it all. Our faith is evidence of what God has done for us. This faith, among other things, is God's word to us and that will never fail.

As we wait for the Great Supper at the end of the ages, we participate in it by grace right now. Eat our Lord's body and drink His blood in today's communion to your health. Feast on him and be transformed that when the king comes, you will be ready, resplendent in wedding clothes in God's honour.