

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Mercy is a call

There is a King who has a son and he is throwing a tremendous wedding banquet. A once in a lifetime experience.

He sends out messengers but look at v 3.

‘He sent his servants to those who had been invited to tell them to come’

Notice that they had already been invited. They had made reservations. And now it's time to get dressed and come.

Remember who he is talking to. The religious leaders. The religious insiders.

The scribes and the Pharisees.

A lot of us are religious insiders. We're baptised. We take the Lords supper.

The reason they don't come is in v 5.

Look what it's says ‘They paid no attention’

Literally it translates as ‘they didn't care’.

There may be many living in this parish who are baptised. But they have not yet come.

Why?

They are indifferent to mercy.

To put it bluntly 'they don't care'. They don't yet.

The people who didn't come in the story saw what was offered and they didn't think it was as good as what they had.

A business

A field.

V 6 tells us that underlying this is a deep hostility.

But please see this - anyone can come - because they have all been called. It's a complex interplay isn't it between God's calling and our response.

The first group get a call and don't respond

The second group get a call and do respond.

..we already know who they are ..

Jesus told us last time we gathered for BCP.

Tax collectors and prostitutes.

I used to love the comedy 'Keeping up appearances' Hyacinth Bouquet. You may remember she had relatives who lived on a council estate and she was always terribly embarrassed about them. Her brother called Onslow and his family.

They were the wrong sort of people.

A true wedding involves inviting everyone - even the odd relatives. Especially, for Jesus, the odd relatives.

In the kingdom, you need to grasp as Gentiles 'we're the odd relatives'.

Here's how you know you've had an authentic Christian experience. You realise very soon after your experience of the mercy of a God that you were 'decided upon'. You were called. That you've been included.

The sense that mercy has been graced to you.

2. A clothed mercy.

Then the story takes a strange turn doesn't it?

The first set of people were the landowners. Then he invited everyone.

V 11 one man at the feast is not wearing wedding clothes

Not wearing the right clothes is a social faux-pas. You must be clothed rightly. This man thought he could come as he was.

Why don't you have your wedding garment on?

That's the question you don't want to wait to be asked by Jesus comes to judge the 'quick and the dead'. It'll be too late.

Two answers to Jesus's question on garments:

I didn't have the chance to go home and get it

I don't own any.

Think back to the everyone invitation. The prostitutes and the tax collectors.

The king must have provided the wedding garments for them, - at his expense. So they could be clothed rightly.

Watching the Royal wedding. It's a royal wedding after all .

A few years ago I was the chaplain to the Master Cutler of Sheffield who was a dear school friend. He invited me to what is called 'the Cutler's feast' but also hired me white tie from a posh tailor just off Sloan Square. All at his expense.

He clothed me.

Easy to be confused. .

On the one hand Jesus is saying come as you are and the Pharisee says it must be earned.

Maybe you like Jesus and 'the come as you are approach' but at the same time you find a God of wrath hard to handle. The destruction happened when Jerusalem was sacked in AD70.

A God who judges and punishes. Which he will and does. Because he is holy and utterly just.

If you dismiss a God of Wrath you are coming without your wedding garment. If God is just a God of love then how can he make the world right and fair.

The modern idea is God just accepts everybody.

Is Jesus a liberal or a fundamentalist? Perhaps some are asking that about me.

Let me ask you. 'Do you believe God loves you?

Yes.

But are you thrilled and amazed by that.

Charles Spurgeon in his sermon on this passage says the difference between the prim and proper and the beggars are the beggars 'cheer for every dish'

As the enormous turkey is brought to the table everyone whoops.

Have you been changed by God's mercy.

Do you see that mercy is a garment. A costly one. A blood soaked one.

3. Mercy is a feast.

This passage is asking us are you feasting on the goodness of God. A good wedding. The tie is loose. You've a good scotch in a good glass. A cigar. Are you astonished. Are you cheering every course?

The meaning of this parable is that it's not your sins that keep you from God. It's not your badness. It's actually your goodness. Your good deeds.

It's the things you think make you good enough. Most of us are not cheering - because we think we deserve the feast.
I never married. You have been actually as every invitee the the wedding has.

Dietrich Bonnhoeffer said this:

It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, it's the marriage that sustains your love'