

The parable of the Wedding banquet is the last of three parables spoken in the temple to the Jewish religious leaders after Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid shouts of hosanna's and just days before Jesus will stand on trial before Pontius Pilate and people of the same city will cry out "let him be crucified". Two weeks ago we heard the parable of the two sons, one who told his father he would not go work in the field but did go and the other who said he would and did not go. Last week our gospel lesson was the second parable of this series wherein Jesus spoke about a landowner of the vineyard and the tenants who killed the landowner's servants and then his son. It is not difficult to see the connection between these three Parables. This entire section of Matthew is about the continuous rejection of Christ and the result thereof along with the unending amount of God's grace poured upon those who least expect it.

In this morning's parable Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet that the king prepares for his son. On the day of the banquet the king issues a summons to his invited guests who have already RSVP'd saying they would come. Now everything has been prepared and all they have to do is show up.

But this matter of "showing up" is just the problem: no one does. Can you imagine how disappointing this was? Put yourself in the king's shoes for a moment. Such a special occasion you have planned for your son – his wedding – all of the preparation, the excitement, and hard work and no one cares enough to show up?

The list of characters in this allegory are clear based on the prior parables and Jesus' identification as the bridegroom in other parts of scripture. The king is God, Jesus is the king's son, invited guests who don't show up are the ones who refuse to acknowledge God in Christ, in this case the religious leaders, and the outcasts who do show up for the banquet are the unexpected guests who God pours his grace upon because they cared enough to come. And finally, the man who was kicked out of the banquet because he was not wearing the appropriate attire represents someone who comes to the party, but is not there to celebrate the real reason the party was given.

This parable at its center displays the reach of God's grace to the least likely of people which is a theme that Matthew has been hammering away at since his opening genealogy in the very first sentences of his gospel. But in this parable that grace is nestled pretty close to judgment as well.

On the one hand human beings are responsible for responding positively to God's invitation. On the other hand the final judgment is solely in the hands of God.

In the case of this parable what is at stake is the entire gospel of the incarnate Christ, the free invitation of grace to sit at the table of God, the free invitation to wear the wedding garment which is indeed to put on the cloak of Christ. What Jesus came to offer the world was the most precious thing God could offer: a divine sacrifice of enormous value. A true gift of unconditional love. And precisely because of the value and the beauty and the majesty of this gift, to have it rejected, or chalked up as being of no account is no small matter. . Yes, you can receive these glorious riches by grace alone but if you cannot be moved by that same grace—if you look at what is offered and find it less interesting than other things that are occupying your heart and mind and life—then it will be impossible for you to find the joy of which Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians that we heard a portion of this morning.

Rejoice in the Lord, beloved. Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you. Rejoice in the lord for the lord is near. Says Paul.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. And above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony Paul says in another one of his letters. Clothe yourselves with Christ and the result will be a transformed life. A life full of joy. This is the garment that the wedding guest refused to put on this is why he therefore he could not live a joy filled life. Joy is not a life absent of pain – Paul is not merely saying "don't worry, be happy", rather true and deep joy comes from the liberating knowledge that even amidst pain there is grace and hope because of what God has done through Jesus Christ. It comes naturally to Paul that prayer should be intimately associated with joy in the lord. Prayer being relationship with God. The work of following Jesus is ever present and never done. It is that of building a community of people who can sustain one another with the reliance on God in their journey of faith.

Keep on with your everyday ordinary works of gentleness and prayerful living says Paul from his prison cell to the Philippians. . In the liturgical calendar of the Church we are currently in what is considered ordinary time.. The word ordinary as used here originated with a Latin term, meaning "time through the year". Ordinary time is ordinal or

counted time. The day after Pentecost begins one of several yearly seasons of ordinary time. During this time the dazzling whites of Easter and the glowing reds of Pentecost are but a memory. The expectant blues of advent have yet to appear. Green is the color for this ordinary season. Green symbolizes life and growth.

It is indeed in our ordinary, everyday living when clothing ourselves with Christ that we experience the extraordinary. . . Seemingly ordinary acts bear extraordinary gifts of God's love. And it is indeed in what the world would consider the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary where I have often encountered people willing to put on and the cloak of Christ. It is in the poor, the "lowly", the sinners and tax collectors, the outcast of today where I have often experienced the face of Christ.

It is in the extremely impoverished students of Holy Cross School in a desperately poverty stricken area of Belize where I experienced the face of Christ. It is in speaking to a woman in a hospital bed who was dying of cancer and yet filled with peace where I encountered Christ. It is in the man just as he is crossing from this life to the next when he told me about how much he loves his wife and asked me keep an eye on her and then peacefully closed his eyes. It is in the recovering addict, the homeless person at the soup kitchen, the Miss May whose house we restored in New Orleans and who had lost so much, but had gained what it means to do something out of love for others and love for God and then decided after years away from the church that she would like to go back.

It is in a partially crippled woman who never complains and always is willing to help others. It is in the elderly who even through severe dementia remember completely a hymn or the Lord's Prayer and show forth that Christ continues to live in them. It is in my own daughter's tears as she cries because of the loss of a beloved dog and her laughter and joy as she baptizes her new puppy with water from her puppy's water bowl. It is in those bedtime prayers and the I love you's that come from the voice of a little girl that tells me when I most need it, that it is not only her voice I am hearing but Christ's too. Christ telling me through a seven-year-old child in a sleepy beautiful voice not to worry, to be joyful, because I love you, says God to me through her.

There is a contemporary Christian song titled Legacy by Nicole Nordeman that captures this concept well. The lyrics go like this:

I don't mind if you've got something nice to say about me ☐ And I enjoy an accolade like the rest ☐ You could take my picture and hang it in a gallery ☐ Of all the who's who and so-n-so's that used to be the best ☐ At such'n'such ... it wouldn't matter much

I won't lie, it feels alright to see your name in lights ☐ We all need an 'Atta boy' or 'Atta girl' ☐ But in the end I'd like to hang my hat on more besides ☐ The temporary trappings of this world

I don't have to look too far or too long awhile ☐ To make a lengthy list of all that I enjoy ☐ It's an accumulating trinket and a treasure pile ☐ Where moth and rust, thieves and such will soon enough destroy

Not well traveled, not well read, not well-to-do or well bred ☐ Just want to hear instead, "Well Done" good and faithful one...

I want to leave a legacy ☐ How will they remember me? ☐ Did I choose to love? Did I point to You enough ☐ To make a mark on things? ☐ I want to leave an offering ☐ A child of mercy and grace who ☐ blessed your name unapologetically ☐ And leave that kind of legacy

My friends, go now, into this ordinary world wearing the cloak of Christ in order that you may witness the extraordinary and leave just that kind of legacy.