

## We are Going to a Party

Today's Gospel reading from Matthew's account is the third Kingdom parable that Jesus gave during Holy Week. What I would like to do today is take a look at this parable, explore some understandings which we can glean from it and then make a few observations about these three parables and see how these observations fit with our notion of the Kingdom of God.

In this parable, Jesus likens the Kingdom to a banquet that the king gives in honor of his son's wedding. After the usual preparations of informing the guests ahead of time that there will be this banquet, kind of like sending out a 'save-the-date' notice, all is ready to commence the banquet. However, due to the indifference by those invited, it looks as though there will be no guests to celebrate the son's wedding. So, instead of letting all that food go to waste, the king has his servants invite people in off the streets, regardless of their social status. Once the feast has started, the king comes in and notices one guest not wearing the expected clothing. At that time, it was expected for guests to wear their 'Sunday best' as it were to such a feast. At the very least, they would wash their everyday clothes or else borrow some suitable clothes from their neighbors. Not to do this would be an insult to the host. Not having done this, the king responds to this contrarian guest in the same manner as those who were initially invited and did not come to the banquet.

Since Matthew tells this parable as a king as the host, the actions of the first invited guests and this guest who did not wear the proper clothes could be interpreted as being a rebellious act against the king. These first guests ignored the king's invitation and decided that they had more important things to do than to come to his feast honoring the heir to the king. Another way of looking at their indifference to the invitation is that they do not recognize the son to be the rightful heir to the throne. In

any case, the king reacts to this act of rebellion as he would any other act of rebellion, destroying the rebels and their homes. The improperly dressed guest could also be seen as a rebel in that he did not follow the norms of society by paying the proper respect due to the king. It would appear that this guest is there only because he knows there will be good food and drink available. While accepting the invitation to attend this fine meal, this guest does not recognize the real reason for the invitation. Unlike the first invited guests, while we do not know why he didn't wear the proper clothes, the king treated him the same way - banishment from the feast.

There are many ways to understand this parable. Typically, it is seen that God will invite anyone to this feast for the Son and those who do not accept the invitation or not do what is expected once they are there will be treated harshly. The first invitees were seen to be the Jews and because they did not accept the invitation, but rather did what they wanted to do, they lost that invitation to the feast. The second group of guests would include anyone and everybody. However, in accepting the invitation, there was still a minimal level of behavior that was expected. Seeing the parable in this way would go along with last week's parable which could be seen as the Jews losing the promises of the covenant with God because they did not accept Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. The fate of the guest who got thrown out could be seen as a warning to us that we can still lose the promises if we don't do what we are supposed to do, those things which Jesus taught us.

If we approach this parable, or any other parable of Jesus, as we would approach a fable, then we would be led to make a moral conclusion at the end of the parable. This moral conclusion would typically be one where we are left with a somewhat smug attitude of being one of the 'ins' while those who are not have lost this status of being on the inside and now must suffer the consequences of this lost status of being a part of the 'chosen ones'. By understanding this parable as well as last week's parable of the wicked

tenants as simple allegories and hearing them as a fable with one meaning, we close ourselves off from hearing the different layers which Jesus weaves into the parables.

When we limit our understanding of these parables to these simple allegories, we find some disturbing things in them. For example, by binding the improperly clothed guest hand and foot and throwing him out into the outer darkness, that place where there is no light at all, isn't that rather extreme? Even if he is seen as a rebel against the king, isn't this banishment to a place where redemption would be impossible be extreme, especially for a God who is seen as being forgiving and willing to give second chances? Also, if we see the Kingdom of God as being 'heaven' where everyone is in agreement with God, then why are we seeing rebels, people who do not do the will of God?

To get answers to these kinds of questions, we need to dig deeper into what details Jesus includes in the parable and how Jesus says things. In doing this, we can get a sense of the many layers that Jesus weaves into these parables and see other ways of hearing these parables.

For example, instead of seeing the improperly clothed guest simply as a rebel, and enemy of God who has infiltrated the kingdom, we can see that by not replying to the king in any way, this guest refused to enter into a relationship with the king. We could apply this same concept of a lack of relationship to the first invited guests. By not accepting the invitation, they refused to have a right relationship with the king. Thus, in a general way, we can see that everyone has been invited to the feast, to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God and the rightful heir. To not have a right relationship with God means that we will face a judgement and the consequences of those things which we have and have not done which were in relationship with God.

The final verse can be troublesome and if we understand it poorly, it could lead an elitist attitude which would lead us to think that the kingdom is an exclusive club instead

of an inclusive gathering of believers. Most times, we hear the words many and few in this last verse to have a quantitative sense to them. In addition to developing an elitist attitude, it also presents God as being picky and choosy as to who enters the kingdom. This is not borne out either in this parable where the slaves indiscriminately invited people off the streets or in the Biblical narrative of John 3: 16 where God so loved the world that anyone who believes in Jesus may have eternal life and not perish. Another way to hear these words many and few would be in a qualitative sense of great or mighty and weak or little. Hearing this verse in this way, we would get the sense that those who are 'great' or 'mighty' are called, but because of their ego they seeing themselves as great or mighty, they feel that they do not need a relationship with God and thus, do not enter into the relationship. On the other hand, those who are 'weak' or 'little' in society's eyes need a 'champion' who will look out for them and protect them from those who look to use them. This 'Champion' would provide the justice and mercy that is required. Throughout the Gospel accounts, we Jesus as being this champion, the One who sees the weak and little not as those who can be used, but as ones who need help, guidance and protection.

By opening our hearts and minds to hear Jesus' parables, especially the parables about the Kingdom of God, in ways that go beyond hearing them as simple fables with a moral to them, we can see the lavishness of grace and love that God has for the creation and all who are in it. In seeing these layers of meaning that Jesus puts into the parables, we are then given the ways in which to respond for the right reasons to God's invitation to the party of all parties.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/3gnZNlfZUgk>

Service: [https://youtu.be/5QQgIN\\_rf5s](https://youtu.be/5QQgIN_rf5s)