

Sermon      October 9<sup>th</sup> 2011      Matthew 22: 1-14

Matthew's rendition of the wedding banquet is not bed time reading, is it? At least the end of the story is not—the guest who came without a proper wedding robe ended up with his hands and feet bound, then was thrown into the outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. It reads like the script of an episode of CSI Miami or NCIS.

Only Matthew ends this parable this way. He took this parable from the source called "Q," by biblical scholars and made the parable not only a statement of God's judgment on Israel for rejecting Jesus, but also a parable to give warning to Matthew's church. Luke's version of this parable concludes with the words, "For, I tell you, none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner." Luke also makes judgment against those in Israel who chose not to respond to God's invitation.

God's judgment against those who reject his son is the theme in this parable which carries over from the parable we read last Sunday about the landowner of the vineyard whose servants were viciously treated, and whose son was even killed. Matthew is intent on conveying the message to the developing new church that the original guests—the people Israel—in rejecting Jesus were being replaced by new guests—non-Jews, i.e., Gentiles, as benefactors of God's salvific grace.

That is the message of Matthew. He seems to set out to firmly establish boundaries between Israel and those who chose to follow Jesus and become his disciples. God is portrayed as having no truck with the recalcitrant Jews, but God is also shown to have high expectations of the Gentile guests too. If a guest comes to the party ill equipped, unrepentant and hostile to the ways of the kingdom of God, then that guest will never see the light of day again.

This is harsh stuff. I told you it was not light bed time reading!

## Today

So what are we to make of this parable today? How do we identify with this, if at all? I ask you to give this some of your own thought.

Does it make you think about what God does expect of us as disciples? Is there a standard of behavior...are we to be clothed in righteousness, for example? Are we to come to the table repentant of our sins, or does it matter? When we come to the Eucharistic table does God expect us to be prepared to share the bread and wine, or is it ok to just follow the crowd, and receive the bread and wine as if it were a mid-morning snack?

In other words, is there meaning in coming to the Table?

If we use the strength of this parable to look at ourselves, I think we might be motivated to look at the way we prepare ourselves to partake of the Eucharistic feast. It can be very helpful spiritually to not take coming to the Table for granted, but to be grateful for the opportunity to receive sustenance spiritually with our sisters and brothers of the church. We are fed by bread and wine—bread and wine which has taken on the spiritual significance of Christ himself.

This parable can help to get us in touch with the reality that it is God who invites us to the Table. God. Think of that...we are invited to partake in a communion that unites the living with the dead and the divine with the human. Mystery of mysteries, it is the unique expression of God in our midst and we are called to be part of it all. And the “we” in this equation means “disciples of Christ.”

## The Banquet Eternal

The parable of the wedding banquet is metaphor for life and death. We are invited to experience the eternal banquet—eternal life—by no one less than God who makes all things possible. Each time we come to the Eucharistic table, we experience a foretaste of the heavenly—the eternal—banquet God prepares for us. We go toward our death not blindly, but with glimpses of God’s grace along the way. That is the great gift of the Eucharistic life to which we are invited through our Baptism into Christ.

Matthew’s message alerts us to the importance of paying attention to the significance of the invitation God makes to us now and into eternity. Now and then are connected! They are not separate events.

We are not forced into anything...we are invited. This invitation is given graciously and it is up to us to respond in kind...to wear the garments of repentance and hopefulness in anticipation of God’s mysterious glory.

---

### Not a secret!

As we ponder this great invitation and look at our own responses to God’s invitation, allow me to suggest that we not keep this a secret. “Go tell it on the mountain” is a Christmas hymn which says it all—“Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is Lord.” You don’t literally have to go to the mountain of course, but engage someone else in your spiritual life. Share your experiences, your faith, your doubts, your questions, your insights and epiphanies---all. Doing so enriches all of us and just might give someone else a grace-filled moment he or she is looking for really hard right now.

I believe people are hungry for conversation and sharing about God, about the spiritual life or lack thereof in their lives. If we can make it safe for people to share, then we will be inviting them to come to the

feast— to come to the table—to come to a place of refreshment and grace hard to come by when one is on the outside, excluded from the bounty of the feast. Do not be shy to invite someone to come to church or to come to an event sponsored here. More than not, the person you include will be honored to be invited, and with a little bit of grace, may experience the grace of God in ways which surpass our understanding.

Be blessed and be filled with the overflowing bounty of God's grace,

Amen.

Grace of God

The Reverend Eleanor Ellsworth, St. James by-the-Sea Episcopal  
Church, La Jolla, CA