

Homily for Pentecost 19, 2020

Matthew 22:1-14

'Refusing God's great invitation'

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TEXT - Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

⁸Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so 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 a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.'

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INTRODUCTION

Of the many plans and activities which have been disrupted this year due to the COVID-19 restrictions, are weddings.

Working out who to invite to your wedding can be difficult at the best of times,

But what do you do when you had 150 people on the list,
And all of a sudden the government says you can only have 100,
Or 50,
Or 20,
Or 10.

Who do you invite?

Who gets left off?

On the other side of the coin,
I've known people to receive wedding invitations which are cause *them* some anxiety,

Maybe you've had an invitation like this that you try to work out how to politely decline.

For example,

The couple who wants to get married in Fiji,

And they're not family or even especially close friends,

Yet they invite you to their wedding,

At your own cost of course.

Flights,

Time off work,

Accommodation at the resort,

Not to mention an obligatory financial gift to the couple to help fund their extended honeymoon through the rest of the pacific islands.

The dynamics of extending and declining invitations can be complex.

And so it is in our text today.

On the one hand there is the gracious and extraordinary invitation of the King to share in the wedding banquet of his Son,

This is the gracious and extraordinary invitation of God to share in the life of his kingdom now and forever,

As his Son, our Lord Jesus,

Through his death and resurrection,

Unites us to himself,

And invites us to never-ending joy with him.

But on the other hand,

There is the perplexing and even shocking ways in which those invited reject the King's invitation,

And the sobering consequences of doing so.

Today we'll see three distinct ways in which people refuse God's great invitation,

First through *indifference*,

Second through *rebellion*,

And third through *pride*.

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REFUSAL THROUGH INDIFFERENCE

So the first refusal is through indifference,

And this first refusal happens in two parts.

The king *“sent his slaves to call those had been invited to the wedding banquet, But they would not come”*.

And immediately you’re meant to see that something very strange and almost inexplicable is going on here.

It’s the wedding of the King’s son,
You’re a citizen of the Kingdom,
And you’ve been invited.

This trumps everything,
You clear the calendar for this,
You do whatever you have to do to be available.

This is so inexplicable,
That it’s almost as if the King assumed there must’ve been a misunderstanding,
This has got to be a miscommunication,

So he sends other slaves with details about the menu,
It’s all ready,
It’s all prepared,

There are no strings attached,

A wonderful feast to celebrate the wedding of the King’s Son,
Come!

And here’s the response I’ve called indifference,

*“But they made light of it and went away,
one to his farm, another to his business...”*

Now there is nothing wrong with farming,

There is nothing wrong with business.

One of the significant things about this refusal of the invitation,

Is that the reasons given are good things,
Not bad things.

So the problem with this attitude is not that it pits something evil against something good and chooses the evil,

It’s that it chooses a temporary and limited good,
Over an eternal and infinite good.

And here you're meant to see the utter absurdity,
Of being so preoccupied with the farm and the business,

That you refuse an invitation to the wedding banquet of the King's Son.

But this is us,

When we are tempted to resist and refuse God's gracious invitation to eternal joy,
Because we are too busy with the things of day to day life.

This is when we don't choose to actively reject the invitation,
But the attitude is more of a shrug of the shoulders,

Indifference to the magnitude of what's on offer.

C.S. Lewis of course has that famous quote about how we're like children in this sense,
I've used this before but please hear it again,
He says,

*"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on **making mud pies** in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a **holiday** at the **sea**. We are far too easily pleased."*

This parable is to wake us up to spiritual reality,
Of what's on offer in God's invitation and what we're willing to trade for it.

Think even about the reasons you're tempted to stay away from worship.

Because the way this works,
is that the Bible's image of the wedding banquet to which we're invited is ultimately a picture of
heaven, of the life to come,

But the Lord's Supper here and now is the foretaste of that feast to come,

Here already now you are invited into the presence and joy of the King and his Son,

God himself prepares the feast for you of forgiveness, life and salvation,

And he offers it all to you as a free gift,
The invitation is purely by his grace,

Come to banquet!

Yet we so easily say,

Ahh, I got other things to do,
Maybe I'll get to that later.

Or if we don't say it we think it,
Or if we don't think it we feel it,

The refusal of *indifference*.

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REFUSAL THROUGH REBELLION

Next though,
Notice there is another group of those invited who refuse in a much more dramatic way,
This is the refusal through *rebellion*.

"...the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them (mocked or treated shamefully), and killed them.

Now if it seems absurd to turn down a gracious invitation to the King's Son's wedding banquet
because of a pre-occupation with day to day things,

It's hard to know what words to even use to describe the madness here.

The King comes not once, but twice, to invite you to his Son's wedding banquet,
It's all provided,
It's all prepared,

Nothing will be lacking,

And you kill the King's servants who delivered the message?!

What on earth is going on here?

Well it's a picture of true depth of the darkness that lies in our human hearts.

Jeremiah said,
"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can understand it?"

You can't understand this reaction from a rational point of view,

Yet it's what we see in the world,
And it's what we find in our own hearts.

There's something about God's gracious invitation in Christ Jesus,
That when people hear it,

Can arouse rebellion,
Normally calm people can become agitated,
Normally peaceful people can become aggressive,
Can stir them up even to violence.

I think of the memorial to Ludwig Nommensen,
who spent most of his life in Indonesia where there are now millions and millions of Christians.

If you read the historical information around there,
You're reminded that before Nommensen's big missionary success, so to speak,

There were other missionaries.

Do you know what happened to them?

The people didn't just hear them out and say,
Thanks, but no thanks,

But they killed them,
As has happened to countless missionaries and Christian martyrs from the early church right through
to today.

And as you watch some of the dynamics happening in our society today,

I think it's helpful to have this sort of thing in the back of your mind.

When you hear people actively and even aggressively wanting to target aspects of the Christian
message and the Christian church,

And you think,
What's going on here,

Well, just remember it's always the way it's been,

There's a refusal through indifference but there's also a refusal through outright rebellion.

But more than that recognize this temptation lurking in your own heart,
And to repent.

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Now what to make here of the King's heavy-handed response?

"The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city."

Well in the parable itself you can sort of understand it can't you.

It's an outrageous act of defiance and rebellion against the King and so he retaliates as most earthly
kings would.

What troubles people is that we know the King represents God here.

Now we do need to be careful we don't think of God in a crass way as if he has emotions that get out of control and if he has a bad day and you get on his wrong side, watch out.

God is not like us in that sense.

But the Bible does speak consistently of God's wrath and judgment on rebellion,
And we are to take that seriously.

And it seems to me here in the parable there's something of Jesus' teaching earlier in Matthew playing out...

'For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.' Matthew 7:2

Now I'm not too sure how far I'd push this,
But in the parable it seems to me that the indifferent,
Are treated with indifference,

Whereas the rebellious and violent,
Receive the same measure they themselves have used.

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REFUSAL THROUGH ARROGANCE

So there's the refusal through indifference,
The refusal through rebellion,

Then finally there's the refusal through *pride*.

Now this is probably the most difficult part of the parable,
The bit about the guy not wearing the wedding robe.

How we get to that from the rebels is that their rejection triggers the King to invite others.

Go out and invite everyone you find,
Good and bad,
Fill the hall with guests.

Nothing is going to stop this King having a wedding banquet for his Son.

¹¹ *'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless.*

Now notice there's something different here from before.

Before it was to do with the way you interacted with the messengers,

Whereas now you're in the presence of the King himself,

So the stakes are higher in a sense.

But why have I labelled this as pride?

People often think,
Maybe this guy couldn't afford the right clothes?
Maybe he forgot them?

But I really don't think that's the picture here.

Notice everyone else could apparently meet the dress code,
These people who had been hauled in off the streets into the banquet,
Somehow, they had the right clothes.

Now how's the case we're not told,

Although there's some evidence in the rest of the Scriptures of the practice of wedding garments
being provided for people at a royal occasion,

Sort of like at a fancy club when men have to wear a jacket,

And if you don't come with one they have some spares on hand to give to you.

So perhaps the wedding garments came with the invitation.

And notice too,
When the man is asked about this,
He doesn't offer any simple explanation like the ones I just did,

instead he's speechless,
Because in the presence of the king himself,
He knows there is no excuse for the way in which he has come.

The picture here, it seems to me,
Is of complete disrespect of the occasion,
Of pride and arrogance.

This is a different attitude to the ones we described earlier.

Because this guy has actually accepted the invitation, in a way,
He wants to be at the banquet, sort of,

But at the very same time he refuses to be there on the King's terms,
He wants to be there on his terms,
In his "clothes",

Through the centuries Christians have pondered what precisely this wedding garment is meant to be.

For example does it represent faith, or righteousness as a gift, baptism, salvation,

Or does it symbolize the life of holiness and good works,

The imagery of being clothes is clearly used in both ways in the Bible.

But perhaps another way to think about the wedding garment here is not so much one thing, But the underlying attitude to God's invitation which can manifest in different ways.

Just like is someone arrived at your child's wedding in a singlet, shorts and thongs, The issue isn't with the clothes themselves, But the attitude of disrespect for the occasion.

And so this part of the parable is particular a warning to us who are Christians, who have heard the gracious invitation of God in Christ Jesus to come to his wedding banquet,

Not to then let that spiritual pride and arrogance creep in which would say to God,

Thanks for the invitation,
But I still think I'd like be here on my own terms,

To find my own means of salvation,

to live my own way.

And the end of the story then is a sobering one,

¹³Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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CONCLUSION

Dear people of God,

The Lord, the King of the universe,

Invites you to share in the wedding banquet of his Son.

The invitation is free,

It comes to all,

And there are no government COVID-like restrictions that will stop God filling his banquet hall with guests,
to feast with him and enjoy the celebration of Christ's victory forever.

Let this parable impress upon your heart the utter madness of refusing this invitation,

Through indifference,
Through rebellion,
Or through arrogance.

God save us from this,
In Jesus' name, Amen.