



Parable of the Wedding Banquet

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28th Sunday in Ordinary Times

Matthew 22:1-14

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What a bizarre parable!! An initial invitation to come to a feast or banquet in honour of the king's son is met with rejection. That is the first oddity in this gospel nobody says no to the King's invitation it is a summons. The invited guests are the elite among the king's subjects. They are clients, political dependents who owe allegiance to the king. But they snub the king's authority. Refusing the king's invitation is tantamount to rebellion. A second invitation is sent out with descriptions of the feast. Still the invitees decide not to attend one returning to his farm another to his business.

However, it gets more bizarre when the second invitation is rejected, and the slaves sent by the King are seized, abused and murdered. This violent response amounts to insurrection and brings about their own destruction. So of course, we now have retaliation from The King. In the form of destruction and murder and burning of the city. The same city where the banquet is being prepared and held.

Now this is where I have a real problem with this parable. The king is God and the son is Jesus when unpicking the parable language. Where is our loving and forgiving God?

It gets stranger when we learn the feast is still on. This time the guests are those on the street. The beggars and outsiders are being invited to the feast. The same streets that the king's soldiers have pillaged and burned.

Let's put this parable in its context, Matthew was written during a time of intense trauma, transition, and identity crisis for Jewish communities in the late first century.

The Temple had been destroyed by Rome in 70 CE, and they were still under Roman Imperial oppression. Matthew's community consisted largely of Jewish believers in the way of Jesus. Jews who believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. They were locked in a fierce sibling rivalry with the emerging Pharisaic/Rabbinic movement over who was the legitimate heir to Israel's scriptural legacy. The followers of the way, such as Matthew and his listeners, had been expelled from the synagogues. This meant the followers were increasingly marginalized, disciplined or expelled from all other Jewish communal spaces.

Matthew and his community saw themselves as faithful Jews who had responded to God's summons to the kingdom banquet offered in honour of God's Messiah, Jesus. But others had inexplicably rejected the great invitation, ignoring or persecuting both the prophets of old, and the new missionaries of the Good News.

In recent weeks we have watched another both bizarre and absurd piece of legislation be raced through Parliament under urgency, The Move On Orders. So now the Police are meeting with the City Missions to work out how they manage the

Orders!! How bizarre is that! The Orders come into effect on the 25th of October.

Our Manutaki, Helen Robinson, worked so hard, as did many others, to prevent the Move On Orders becoming Law and now, we continue to work with the Police to manage the law.

Wouldn't be great if we can work with the Police and the legislation to ensure we at Te Tāpui Atawhai know where our ill rough sleepers are and if they need to be moved on, they get moved to a safe place such as ED or the Library or Homeground if we are open.

An unexpected invitation or summons from the King to the commoners on the street suggests the surprising ways the invitation to God's Kingdom banquet is increasingly extended to and embraced by those once considered outsiders.

At last, the feast has started the King enters the banquet hall and greets the guests who are all attired in wedding robes, except one. When the King doesn't get a satisfactory answer from the incorrectly dressed guest, the King banishes him into "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth". The poor person will be regretting accepting the invitation to this feast.

Matthew is warning his community against self-satisfaction. While this King is generous, the guests who are beneficiaries of this unexpected and generous invitation, must nevertheless be on guard against the complacency shown by the first invitees. The doors of the kingdom community are thrown wide open, and the invitation extends literally to all. But once you join, there are standards. You need to act as if you have joined the

kingdom of heaven and that includes wearing the right gear, wedding robes.

If appropriate clothing is a metaphor for the need for appropriate behaviour in the new and inclusive community, the parable may be saying more. Perhaps Matthew originally intended this as a warning to live up to the rigorous standards of a higher righteousness.

The problem with the inappropriately dressed guest is he has not joined in and entered the banquet of the kingdom of heaven. As the theologian Karl Barth says, "In the last resort, it all boils down to the fact that the invitation is to a feast, and that he who does not obey and come accordingly, and therefore festively, declines and spurns the invitation no less than those who are unwilling to obey and appear at all".

The imagery of this parable is varied and confusing. We have a banquet, an image of joy, love and celebration. Then we have murder, pillaging and burning. An image of destruction and fear all in the same place where the banquet continues.

This parable shows judgement not only on the religious elite for rejecting God's purposes in Jesus but also on disciples. The audience of disciples of Jesus is warned that responding to the call is the beginning of a life committed to God's purposes and requires ongoing faithfulness and fruitfulness.

While the context of in which Matthew was written, explains a lot about this parable it leaves me feeling uncomfortable very much as the Move On Orders leave me uncomfortable. Where is God's enduring love?

Amen.