

Reflection Sunday 11th October

Matthew 22: 1-14

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again 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." But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then 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." For many are called, but few are chosen.'

There are times when we read a passage and might want to say, "My Jesus wouldn't say that!" If that is the case have we got the wrong image of Jesus?

There seems to be a desire for "all are welcome" to mean, "anything goes." That is not the way of Jesus. Yes all are welcome but change is necessary because he loves us.

In a previous appointment I conducted over 200 weddings during my time in the Circuit. I got quite used to leading such events. I sometimes had problems with recognising the groom on his wedding day. On prior occasions I had seen him casually dressed on the wedding day I would find 5 chaps identically dressed and had to try to work out which was the groom. The bride was a little easier as her dress was very different to the bridesmaids. There were occasions I looked at the guests and wondered why they had chosen the outfit they were wearing but the bridal party had no say in such matters.

The custom at royal weddings in many parts of the world at the time of Jesus, and a long time after, was that the host of the royal feast would provide a garment for the guests to wear, a Kaftan like garment; all would be clothed appropriately in the "house colours". One guest, it would appear, in the story Jesus told, had refused to put on the proffered garment but still entered the feast, an affront to the king. "Out on his ear!" was the decision.

How is this to be seen in the context of the Kingdom of God? All are invited to the Kingdom feast but we are to be clothed in righteousness paid for by the death of Christ on the cross. We cannot be part of the Kingdom if we are not prepared to being changed by God.

Paul when writing to the Colossians wrote "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." (Col. 3:12) (This passage was one frequently used at weddings and it gave me a good opportunity to ask questions about outfits.)

Those who came to Jesus as outsiders were welcomed but also healed, restored, transformed by his love and grace. The prostitutes and extortionists were welcomed but his love refused to let them stay as they were.

All are welcomed to enter the Kingdom but we have to accept the transforming grace of Jesus and not think ourselves above change.