

**Isaiah 25.1-9; Matthew 22.1-14**

**Isaiah 25.1-9**

O LORD, you are my God;

I will exalt you, I will praise your name;  
for you have done wonderful things,  
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

<sup>2</sup> For you have made the city a heap,  
the fortified city a ruin;  
the palace of aliens is a city no more,  
it will never be rebuilt.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;  
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

<sup>4</sup> For you have been a refuge to the poor,  
a refuge to the needy in their distress,  
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,  
<sup>5</sup> the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,  
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;  
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

<sup>7</sup> And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

<sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.

<sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day,  
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.  
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

**Matthew 22.1-14 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet**

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite

everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe,<sup>12</sup> and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless.<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen.’

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*The Kingdom of heaven is like a wedding banquet, prepared by a King who is loving, generous, and merciful. All are invited to this banquet, to celebrate and participate and in doing so become like the king – generous, grateful and merciful, bearing the fruit of the Kingdom of heaven.*

Who likes a good feast?

Both our bible readings this morning are about big feasts:

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah we heard about ‘a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines’ that the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples on mount Zion: a prophetic vision and of hope and flourishing amidst the stark reality of oppression and conflict of the people of Israel at the time.

In our gospel reading from Matthew Jesus tells the parable which compares ‘The kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.’ Wedding feasts, and other feasts, too, are central to the vision of the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus began his public ministry at the wedding of Cana, where he turned vast quantities of water into wine – a sign of God’s good and gracious intentions towards his people. God is always inviting!

Do we find it hard to accept that invitation? What is it that prevents us from joyfully receiving the good news of a God who loves us and invites us to love in return. The state of the world – the awful violence we are seeing in the Holy Land – seems a long way from that vision.

It is this reality that is addressed in this morning’s parable. It is a challenging and confusing bible passage, with a series of implausibilities and an ending that leaves us alarmed and shocked at the treatment of the wedding guest who is not wearing the right garment.

There are two keys to interpret this parable: first, it's setting in Matthew's gospel **and** second, the context in which Matthew is writing his gospel for the early church communities who are reading it.

First: the setting: Jesus tells this parable in Jerusalem, in the temple, in the days before his own death. The day before, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was welcomed with shouts of Hosannah. He has thrown the money lenders and traders out of the temple. The chief priests and other religious leaders feel very alarmed and threatened, and keep challenging Jesus. He responds by telling them parables [ starting with tenants in the vineyards; followed by this one about the wedding banquet.

The story line isn't quite plausible – here is the king who had invited certain people to the wedding banquet. They must have accepted the invitation since the king orders the oxen and fatted calves to be killed for the feast. The king sends his servants out twice to ask them to come- all is ready- but they don't. Some decide they would much rather get on with their lives, while others seize the king's slaves, maltreat them, and kill them, which seems a very extreme reaction.

Here, we are move into a kind of allegory of the history of Jerusalem itself – the king's messengers become the prophets, and Jesus is the Son. The “city” that represents the privileged disdainful invitees (but not its own poor) is of course Jerusalem.

Matthew's readers at the time - some decades after Jesus death - will not only have made the connection with Jesus' death, but they would have been aware of the fate of Jerusalem, which was destroyed by Roman armies in the year 70.

As we turn to the final part of our gospel passage, it is a second parable, intended to surprise and jar, it is helpful to have our second key for interpreting this parable in mind: mind Matthews 'congregation', the new Christian community, who have accepted the invitation to the wedding banquet; who are at the feast now. This does, of course, include ourselves!

So, the king's wedding banquet goes ahead – it's what the king wants for his world and creation -a banquet to be part of and enjoy. The slaves are asked to gather all they can find, both good and bad. When we think of the Church, how quickly it grew including Jewish and Gentile Christians, gathering in many - indeed, the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Why does the King pick on the poor guest who is not wearing the right garment? It sounds rather unfair - people would not have had time to get themselves wedding outfits – and in any case – we assume they weren't rich or wealthy. As far as we know, people did not have special wedding garments. One commentary suggests there was a linen cloth that might have been worn for special occasions.

Of course, this is not about a physical robe. This is about our response to the God's invitation into his kingdom: to clothe ourselves with the garment of love and mercy that God offers us, to bear the fruit of the kingdom, which Jesus has taught about and modelled in his own life. If we want to know what that looks like, we can turn to the sermon on the mount or the last parable Jesus tells in Matthew's gospel, of the last judgement, when he will separate people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. We heard it in our gospel reading last Sunday.

Was Matthew saying to the early Christians, and to us: it's not good enough just to turn up and belong without being open to hearing the good news of Jesus Christ and allowing it to transform us, to become more like him and bear the fruit of the kingdom. The feast has begun! Participate and become merciful, compassionate, generous as our loving God is.

The parable tells us all are invited, the good and the bad. The King picking on this one guest to me is representative of all those parts in ourselves – because all of us are both, good and bad – those parts of ourselves that are stubborn and self-centred, keeping God at arm's length, refusing to let go of our prejudices and preoccupations, all that gets in the way of letting God's grace and mercy transform us.

Each Sunday, we are invited to participate in this banquet of the Eucharist, as we break open the Word and break bread together, in remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Do we wear the garment that makes us open to receiving God's transforming goodness and grace?

As we wrestle with this morning's gospel passage and the feast it describes, perhaps, the awkwardness of this passage is intentional – in case we think we know already what is asked of us let alone that we have fulfilled it. Let us ponder the kingdom of heaven: it is like an invitation, like a banquet, like a command, and always a mystery. Amen.