

Matthew 22:1-14

AM I INVITED?

Last year I was asked to - "SAVE THE DATE" for my nephew's wedding in Canada for July this year. I was so excited, not only noted the date, and started planning and preparing straight away. What clothes should I wear? Will there be a theme colour? What colour saree it would be and what jewellery I should wear. In fact the wedding took place yesterday, but unfortunately we were not able to attend due to the current Covid situation.

I am sure you too would have had the similar experience of receiving "save the date" requests.

Today we are looking at a parable that Jesus told about a wedding banquet.

Jesus is comparing the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet that a king is putting on for his son. It appears, like the "save the date", the guests had prior notification.

I have put myself in this parable and ask myself -----**AM I INVITED?**

Have you ever received an invitation to a party you really did not want to attend? What did you do about that? I'll bet you did not mistreat, abuse and murder the postman. That's what happened in this parable.

Have you ever invited people to your party who did not attend? You cleaned, you cooked, and you decorated. The table was set, the candles were lit, and the music was playing. Everything was ready, but some of the guests didn't come. Did it make you so angry that you wanted to burn their houses down and harm them? That is what happened in this parable.

In this parable, it appears that God is an angry king who, if he doesn't get his way, destroys his own people and burn their cities. That simply does not fit with the God revealed by Jesus Christ throughout the four gospels.

No doubt, this is a parable of judgement, but it may not be the judgement we think it is. Speaking about the first group of guest the king says, "Those invited were not worthy". Does that imply, those in the second - invited group were worthy? We tend to get nervous and fearful when God begins making judgements. It leaves us wondering whether we are in the first group or the second group. Are we unworthy or are we worthy?

I suspect our nervousness and fear about God's judgement arise from the assumption that God judges us in the same way we so often judge others. More often than not, our judgement of others are judgement of exclusion.

- What if it's just the opposite with God?
- What if Jesus is trying to shock us into seeing the kingdom of heaven is not business as usual according to our standards?
- What if God's judgement on our lives is one of grace, acceptance, and invitation; a judgement of inclusion?

If that's true then what separates or differentiate the first-invited guests from the second?

- The difference isn't that one was more deserving than the other. The first-invited guests were the recipients of the king's invitation and favour. But so were the second-invited guests. And so was the man who showed up without a wedding robe. They were all invited.

They were all favoured. None of them had done anything to earn or deserve an invitation. It was just given. If that's true for them; **it's true for us too.**

- The difference isn't that the king likes one group more than the other group. His sole motive is to share the banquet. He wants someone, anyone, and everyone, to join in his joy and celebration, and be a part of his kingdom and life; **the peace, the love, the forgiveness, the compassion and the providence.** Both groups were given the same opportunity. If that's true for them, **it's true for us too.**
- The difference isn't that some guests are good and others are bad. There is no distinction or judgement made, based upon their past, their behaviour, their beliefs, their attitudes or their morals. To the contrary, with the second round of invitations the king sends his servants into the main streets with the instructions to "invite everyone you find". And they did. They "went out into the streets to the highways and the byways and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad". If that's true for them, **it's true for us too.**

There is only one thing that distinguishes the first-invited guests from the second-invited guests - **IS THE PRESENCE. BEING PRESENT.** The second-invited guests showed up. The first-invited guests did not. So the "wedding hall was filled" with the second-invited guests. That is the only difference between the two groups.

The key to our life in God is to show up, to be present. If we are to be present with God, we are to be present with others.

- It means accepting the other person as our priority;
- It means seeing them for who they are and not who we want them to be or think they should be;
- It means opening ourselves to receive their life into our own;
- It means really listening to what they say and not just what we hear or want to hear;
- It means letting go of our own agendas, our distractions, our fears and our prejudices;
- It means bringing and offering all that we are and all that we have.

If we are not doing that with others, we are probably not doing it with God. Instead we too often go our separate ways and go about our selfish ways. Too busy, too tired; better things to do and better places to go. That is what the first-invited guests did.

What they did not realize, and what we sometimes do not realize, is that there is no life outside the banquet, the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

To show up and be present is to be worthy before God. We don't earn or prove our worthiness as a pre-requisite to entering the banquet. We show up, be present, and discover for ourselves the worthiness God has always known about us. That is when -----**our lives begin to change.**

In the well known Psalm of Psalm 23, we read - " he makes me lie down in green pastures; leads me beside still waters; he guides me in paths of righteousness; he prepares a banquet in the presence of my enemies; he anoints my head with oil.

So much on offer only if we only accept the invitation. Too many of us are so distracted about the pleasures of this world and the enemy in our lives that we forget to look at the table of provision that God has set before our eyes. Let us remember this -- we can either look at the enemy which leads us astray or lose our appetite or we can sit down and feast on all the blessings that God has already provided.

Now, what about the guy who showed up without a wedding robe?

We see that this is more than just a dress code violation. Something else was missing. **“He was speechless”**. It was as if he wasn’t really there. Jesus is reminding us that there are times when we show up but we are not really present. Our body is there but we have left the room.

What if this man had said something, anything? What if he had just made his presence known, not so much to the king but to himself? What if he had said,

- I was hungry, I smelled the food. I trusted you to feed me.
- I was lonely. I saw the lights on. I trusted you to take me in.
- I was thirsty. I knew there would be wine. I trusted you to give me a drink.
- I was naked. I knew people would be well dressed. I trusted you to clothe me.
- I was sad and grieving. I heard music and laughter. I trusted you to share your joy.
- I was empty. I saw abundance. I trusted you to fill me.
- I was dying. I saw the door was open. I trusted you to give me life.

What if he had said any one of those or a thousand other things like that? It would have been enough. The king would have said to him, “Oh, my dear friend, I’m so glad you got my invitation. I’m so glad you are here. You are worthy”.

And if that’s true for him, then it’s true for us too.

The good news is, God invites us all. Not just once. Gives us chances, gives us opportunities. He does not show favouritism. His invitation is open to all. It is up to us to accept it or not.

The man who turned up without the wedding clothes can also remind us that he did not honour or show respect to his host the king.

In Jesus’ days, guests coming to royal banquet were expected to wear festal garments.

For wealthy, that meant embroidered robes and gowns adorned with precious jewels.

For the poor, it meant the best clothes you had freshly washed. Wearing festal garments indicated ones full participation of the joys of the celebration.

The way he dressed could even be interpreted as a sign of disrespect and insult. So in the parable, the king had every reason to throw him out.

But there is more.

In the Bible, clothes have a symbolic meaning.

They are a sign, of being dressed in the righteousness of God. To be clothed in the righteousness of God is to be immersed in the teachings of Jesus and to be filled with his spirit.

The good news is that God supplies us with all the clothes we need to fight the sinfulness of injustice and oppression, the self-centeredness and greed.

He gives them to us as a free gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The catch is we have to be willing to put them on. Not only on Sunday morning here at church, but throughout the week, in our homes, and out in the community.

The invitation to the banquet is open to anyone and everyone.

As I started asking - ***Am I invited?*** The answer is ***YES***. I am invited, and so are you. We are all invited.

So, let us clothe ourselves with the righteousness of God and enter the banquet proudly wearing the garment of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love of Christ Jesus.

Let us pray:- "Dear Lord and Father of mankind,

Forgive our foolish ways;

Re clothe us in our rightful mind,

In purer lives thy service find,

In deeper reverence, praise" (StF495)

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.