

“Surely goodness and mercy follow us for all days,
and we will dwell in the house of our Lord
our whole life long.” AMEN!

The invitation was accepted by Mara gladly.

Each Sunday she came to the house of the Lord
where the doors were open and the table was set.

The Host accepted her and welcomed her with warmth.

“Come in!” They said.

“There is a place for you.”

Mara smiled and stepped inside and
took her seat among the others.

She loved the music, the candles, and
the kind voices around her.

Mara found herself speaking of the Host’s generosity,
but at each visit she wore the same old cloak.

The cloak, long ago, was fresh.

Now, though, it was stained.

There were marks of arrogance.

Around the stains were patches of pride and callousness.

The cloak grew heavier each week
with old grudges and past decisions.

When someone looked at her too long with pity,
she'd snap.

When another received praise,
she'd burn with envy.

The host continued to speak of forgiveness,
but Mara only pulled her cloak closer and
tighter around her shoulders.

One evening before the feast, the Host
brought Mara a fresh garment.

It was not only clean and bright, but
woven with mercy, patience, humility, and love.

The Host said, "Mara, you are always welcome here,
but you do not have to keep wearing
what once belonged to you from your old life.

You have permission to set it down, and put this on."

Mara looked at the new garment and
recognized its beauty, simplicity, and grace.

But she couldn't set her old cloak aside.

It's familiarity was too strong.

"I'll put this on someday," she said, and
slipped it back in the box.

Years passed and still Mara came to the feast and
she still took her place at the table, but
the old cloak grew heavier and heavier and
the stains spread.

Then one day, she understood.

She described it as being like the sun rising over a hill.

Accepting the Host's invitation was
what brought her through the front door and
gave her a place at the table, *but only*

by accepting the new garment *and* putting it on,
could she begin the new life offered to her
from the beginning. (Pause)

This retelling of Jesus' parable highlights,
for me the true message.

Many are called to put on the new life God offers,
but few are willing to actually change
from their previous burdens or current
wicked ways. (Pause)

In Matthew's telling of Jesus' parable we find
that some groups invited were
violent and morally unfit.

Last week's parable about the wicked tenants
resonates to this group of violent and morally unfit.

In today's parable, there are also ones who
don't take the invitation seriously, or
find that there's a better usage of their time
to go out make money or tend to their farm.

Still others were violent, performed mistreatments,
and even committed murder on
the servants delivering the invitations
to the wedding feast.

Matthew's version of the
wedding banquet parable magnifies
the political dimensions of Matthew's
time and place.

As destruction continued to unfold from
Roman occupation and poor temple leadership,

Matthew posed worldly empires against
the coming of Jesus that included Rome and
the religious elite who should have known better.

(Pause)

As we move through the parable we learn that
the invitations are out and the parable
becomes increasingly alarming.

The ruler is enraged at the responses to
the invitations and treatment of the servants.

The King sent troops to destroy the murderers and
burn their cities.

And then a new guest list is created and all are invited,
“both the good and the bad.”

They’re all invited to the wedding banquet.

What a gift of grace!

A kingly message of reprieve is granted to all.

If only the parable ended here! :-/

It doesn’t, and the parable keeps us squeamish
as Matthew brings a terrifying twist to the story...

one of the guests lacks the “proper” wedding garment
and can’t explain why.

He’s bound hand and foot,
and thrown out into the darkness where
there’s weeping and teeth gnashing.

“The threefold iteration underscores how serious
Matthew is about the end-of-time torment
that awaits those who dishonor, [or ignore]
the invitation of God’s grace.”

Writes commentator Carolyn Sharp and I’ll add to it.

We must put God’s grace on and wear it.

Drink in deeply the words of verse 13:

Bind him hand and foot, and throw him
into the outer darkness, where there will be
weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Like Mara in my first little parable,
accepting the invitation is the beginning,
but the parable tells of
something more that’s expected.

Suddenly, this banquet feast is not only
about a joyous celebration.

The space is a sanctuary from malevolent forces
that threaten the little ones that Jesus embraces.

The banquet hall is a sanctuary for those workers
who could only work one hour in the vineyard and
still received the wage to live on.

The hall is a sanctuary for the most vulnerable, and...

According to Jesus, it is not a sanctuary for those
who use religion to prey on, or threaten, others.
(Pause)

Like all parables, this one invites us
to place ourselves in it.

We've received the invitation.

Which group do we belong to?

The one's who said they were too busy?
I've been it that group.

The others who made light of it and went back to work?
I've been in that group.

How do the decisions we make
participate in killing people?

Perhaps the most important question of them all. (Pause)

We do well to let the parable make us uneasy.

The Lord is near, do you perceive the nearness.

Let us put on the new robe and the new life and
let our gentleness be known to everyone.

AMEN!