

**PROPER 23, YEAR A**  
**ST LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

*Matthew 22:1-14*

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, mistreated 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."

A father took his child out to the park to play one day. The child *really* didn't want to go. When they got to the park, the father said, "I brought you here to enjoy yourself: you just jolly well get on with it! Start enjoying yourself!" What happened when the child failed adequately to obey a command to enjoy itself? A *command* to enjoy oneself. Seriously? What did the father do next? We are not told, but we must hope that his reaction did not involve bloodshed.

I have no doubt that this is a true and all-too-familiar story of human parenthood, but what has it got to do with today's Gospel reading from St Matthew? At least in this week's parable (for a pleasing change), the setting is a wedding feast, not a vineyard full of disgruntled or even murderous fruit-pickers. However, this being Matthew, there is the usual murder, rage, weeping and, of course, the obligatory gnashing of teeth.

Clergy get to go to a lot of wedding celebrations. They are almost always very enjoyable occasions. I myself love celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony! The downside is often the reception – the wedding feast to which the king in today's parable is sending out invitations.

Even receptions can be amusing except for the speeches and occasionally the paint-stripper masquerading as champagne. Some of us even get to go to royal weddings. I can't remember one in which a King, or other Royal Personage, was so miffed at non-attendance that they called out the Brigade of Guards, killed those who had mistreated and killed the messengers carrying the

invitations, and burned down the King's own city out of pique. Was there ever such a case of wedding nerves? And what about the Bride? And Bridezilla, the mother of the Bride??

One bride told me that she really understood today's Gospel reading. "It's all about the dress!" she chortled.

In St Luke's version, (Chapter 14: 15 -24), just one servant is sent out by a man, a householder, not a king, into the highways and byways to invite everyone to a banquet, not a wedding. The servant returned, quite unmurdered. Those who rejected the invitation are merely replaced by the poor and maimed and blind and lame, and then just everybody else out there in need of a jolly good meal. The generous criterion for being invited was neediness. There is no absurd requirement that everyone had to wear a morning suit or else. (Mine, should you wish to know this, is hanging, striped trousers, black tailcoat, dove grey vest, silvery tie, and all, in my wardrobe. One never knows when it may once more be put to use, and one would not wish to be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness).

No slaughter in St Luke. No gnashing. No outer darkness. Therefore no problem identifying an enraged tyrant with God.

But Matthew's dark, blood-drenched version ends with a revealing ray of Divine Light not found in Luke: "Many are called but few are chosen."

You and I know that the parable expresses the historical rejection by Israel to the marriage feast of the Lamb. They were called by Paul, and other disciples, but their response was rather negative. Paul is one such messenger. He was beaten up and cast into what was probably a very dark jail, and, having nothing else to do, probably practiced weeping and teeth-gnashing. St Stephen was another and look what happened to him. (Try Acts 7, verses 51 and following, where, in verse 54, you will even find teeth-gnashing).

Matthew's young Christian community is breaking acrimoniously away from its roots in a synagogue. It is a messy divorce. There is clearly anger and bitter disappointment. The Lamb is not an item on the non-Vegan menu in the parable. Rejecting the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, so enrages God that he destroys his city, in this case we are to understand that is, or was, Jerusalem. And the late invitees are the Gentiles? That's us.

Do you have your festal garments ready for when the invitation comes? Get them back from the cleaners! Ladies choose a suitable hat! However, the wedding garments in this parable are not posh formal clothing by Gieves and Hawkes. They are a state of spiritual preparedness: a receptive state of the soul ready to receive the summons of God. Who would not want to go and enjoy themselves at the heavenly banquet? Who would have something better to do, some prior commitment? Just think! There will be no boozed-up incoherent best-man speeches! Fantastic vintage

champagne will be served to those who like that sort of thing!

Many have been called: *we have*, all of us, including those of us who are spiritually poor and maimed and blind and lame and even those out there standing in a hedge or muddy field in Dinwiddie County. Few are chosen but chosen as what? Guests? Or bearers of the most desirable invitation to the most wonderful feast! *Our* calling, that for which *we* are chosen, is to show by our own anticipatory joy and enthusiasm that this is not a wedding banquet to miss!

If our ministry of invitation is done with sufficient passion, do you think God will have to command people to jolly well enjoy themselves? No, I don't think so either! Therefore rejoice! Therefore get ready and wait, for your invitation is surely on its way in God's good time. Enjoy yourself in the meantime! Share the bliss! Share the hope!!!

Amen.

God bless and keep us all as we await the arrival of our invitation, remembering that we know not the day or the hour!

Your priest and friend,  
John+