

Matt 22:15-22

The kingdom of Heaven is like! Remember Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God... here and now!

First a little context which surrounds these stories. This is set during Holy week...Jesus has just arrived in Jerusalem on a colt foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah. Thousands of people are here in Jerusalem for the Passover festival...tensions are high... Upon Jesus' arrival he makes a scene...turning over the temple money changers' tables. This is the next morning and Jesus is returning to the city.

Upon his way in he curses a fig tree comparing it to Israel no longer bearing fruit. Then he enters the temple and is confronted by the chief priests asking Jesus, "By what authority do you do these things?" Then Jesus responds with these parables of judgment:

- The Parable of the Two Sons
- The Parable of the Wicked Tenants
- and today... The Parable of the Wedding

..and who do you think these parables are judging? The common folk? NO... He is critical of those in leadership...the very people who are supposed to represent God to God's people, bearing the fruits of God's kingdom here on earth...But instead these religious folks have sold out to those in power and wealth...welcome to the kingdom of man.

The religious establishment has now become part of the system of oppression that God's kingdom was supposed to set right. Mmmmm does this sound familiar at all!?

You see these parables are not for those who have messed up their lives and need to get everything right...these harsh words are for those participating and perpetuating a system that creates the injustices in the first place (and then they are using God's name in the process). You see why Jesus is so pissed off!?

Those who talk about giving their hearts to God but in reality have given their hearts and souls to power and wealth here in the kingdom of man...we call that Satan...ego our own selfishness at the expense of God's creation and God's children.

Israel, the people of Abraham, the children of God, are supposed to bear fruit and bring this new reality to all the world...yet Jesus comes into a world firmly entrenched in the kingdom of Herod and Rome with all its power and corruption and systematic oppression and God's own dwelling place on earth has now been made a part of that system... Jerusalem itself!

You see how relevant all this is for us today?

Does any of this stuff seem familiar...somethings never change in the hearts of man...just change the names of the empires and the marginalized groups and the religions and it's the same story right here and now in our country and abroad!

You see Jesus wasn't killed because he was a nice guy! He was subversive and radical and stood up to the systematic oppression that He saw all around him...and He asked the same of those who would follow Him!

In Matthew's gospel Jesus knows he is going to be betrayed and killed and He certainly isn't happy about it!

He condemns the contempt that Israel as a whole (and everyone in general) had (and has) for God's gracious invitation to living a life firmly rooted in the Kingdom of God on Earth!

The focus of today's parable is on a wedding banquet for a Son...wink wink! The reference is to the Messianic banquet, which is not only mentioned in Revelations but also in the Rabbinic Literature. At the end of the age in Jewish tradition all the people of God will enjoy a banquet

as they transition from this life to the life to come...(from this reality to a new reality).

And throughout the Old-testament the wedding imagery is that of God taking his bride – Israel’s wedding covenant that was established on Mt. Sinai under the Chuppah (the wedding canopy), and we see in the reading today how God’s chosen people committed adultery on their wedding night.

And our Christian Bible also ends with a wedding feast. And what is a wedding...certainly not an ending... but a new beginning...a new relationship formed with the union of two entities. It’s in effect a new reality...a new way of perceiving and being in the world!

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Yet God and Jerusalem had now become idols...symbols for a reality that held those who considered themselves special to be the favored ones... everyone else were outsiders!

The invitation from Jesus is first to those religious leaders being called to repent, and to come back and fulfill the promises they made to God.

There are four parts of the parable here to consider:

The invitation which is refused – that’s God’s grace offered.

A second invitation (Jesus’) which is violently opposed – Jesus’ invitation to live into God’s reality and this is held in tension with the reigning empire. See systems of power generally don’t do well with inclusion thus eliminating any who would stand in the way or disrupt the status quo.

Then third there’s an invitation given to ANY BODY who wants to come...a wider invitation to the rest of the world. ALL are invited... this time it was for those outside of Israel.

And last we have those who are not properly attired – those accepting the invitation... but not really living into this new reality...those not clothed in the proper attire!

A little perspective here... It was customary for the host to actually provide their guests suitable attire... So the wedding host is literally giving you the robe (there's grace again)...and not to wear that garment showed a lack of respect and appreciation to your host...There is no real excuse for not wearing the proper attire...and as he is speechless so are the religious authorities.

Jesus uses this Greek word here for friend (sarcasm) (which he will use very shortly with Judas). The word friend here is a rebuke for someone opposed to the will of God...opposed to God's Kingdom.

Israel was given everything... and still chose the kingdom of man (money, prestige and wealth) over the kingdom of God...remember they got to choose.

Israel is God's bride throughout the Old Testament and in the New Testament the CHURCH is the bride...and throughout the gospel when people are faithful to God... things go well, and when they are unfaithful and rely on themselves... things quickly go downhill fast.

You see in the end we get to choose the realty we will live...the kingdom of man (the world created in our image) or the kingdom of God (the world as God created and intended it to be...And because of God's love for us...we get to choose! We get to choose whether to accept the gift or not.

If we had no choice...well then it wouldn't be a gift. Grace is given unconditionally in love... But if you choose to go to the wedding... us so called Christians... then don't think that you are not expected to live into that reality.

I got to spend a day with Peter Rollins, he is a theologian, philosopher, and pastor in Northern Ireland.

He's gotten some love from both fundamentalists and progressives... when in a religious panel interview some folks tried to trap him by asking him if he denied the resurrection... and he answered the question as follows...

“Yes I deny the resurrection! I deny the resurrection every time I do not serve my neighbor! I deny the resurrection every time I walk away from people who are poor... every time I participate in an unjust system.

...and I affirm the resurrection... I affirm the resurrection every now and again when I stand up for those who are on their knees... I affirm the resurrection when I cry out for those people who have had their tongues torn out...When I weep with people who have no more tears to shed.”

See we are all invited as Christians to follow Jesus...and it won't ever be easy...but it will always lead to a life worth living...what Jesus refers to as everlasting life...

We are invited as participants in the ongoing re-creation and reconciliation of the world. Come to the wedding feast... all are invited... but not many really choose to go or participate.

You have all been given invitations to the kingdom of heaven. What have you chosen to do with your precious gift...and if you choose to enter then you are being asked to walk the talk...to put on the mantle the garments of God... and then to extend that gift to others.

Many are "called," but few are chosen. The word "many" here is not intended to be a restriction. The invitation has gone out to all who care to listen...but some just refuse...while others want to come... but refuse to love God and one another...they just came for the free food.

Those folks referred to as "chosen" are those people who respond to the invitation AND respond by living as Christ instructed us to do.

So when given a choice how will you choose?

Look around... it's not hard to compare ancient Israel and modern day Christianity... Do we keep God at our center... where grace and peace and love are our currency...or do we keep the empire at the center where money, power and violence are it's currency?

Dr. Martin Luther King captured the essence of this in his sermon a Time to break the silence, in it he said,

"Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood, and because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned, especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come to speak for them.

"This I believe to be the privilege, and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism... and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions.

We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation and for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers"...he goes on to say,

"Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. And this belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up John's letter: "Let us love one another, for love is God. And every one that loves is born of God and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love." "If we love one another, God dwells in us and His love is perfected in us."

Let us hope that this spirit will become the order of the day." Dr. King lived, and died, confronting the evils unleashed into our world – fruits born of capitalism, militarism, and racism...

The Kingdom of God comes at a cost doesn't it?

Today's parable once again affirms the boundless generosity and inclusive reach of God's grace... but Jesus also affirms that for us to accept this precious invitation well that requires nothing less than our whole life lived with God...and others...at the center of our being!

Your faithful servant,

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