

Ponder the Lord's Call

We were invited to some friends golden wedding celebration last weekend. One thing I really enjoy about an occasion like that is the opportunity to get a bit 'dressed up'. It is often at events like these that some of the most amusing and perceptive comments come from children.

I read a story about a mum who'd been invited to a wedding with her young daughter. This was the first wedding this little girl had ever been too and while the couple were taking their vows she asked her mum why the bride was dressed in white?

Her mum, not wanting a long discussion during the service, told her little girl that white was the colour of happiness and this was the happiest day of the bride's life.

The little girl pondered for a moment and then whispered:

'So why is the groom not wearing white!

Maybe she has a point.....?

It is a wedding scenario that Matthew uses to tackle the parable of the wedding banquet in our reading this morning. Attention there is focused on the joyous celebratory occasion.

In this section of Matthew there is a sequence of 3 parables; The 'The two sons', 'The wicked tenants' and lastly in chapter 22 'The wedding banquet'. They all have the image of the kingdom of heaven, the divine reality dawning in and through the ministry of Jesus.

In the parable of the wedding banquet;
The king is God and the Son, Jesus.

It focuses on the unresponsiveness of the Pharisees and Priests to the message of God and a threatening confrontation develops between them.

Words and behaviour intensify the conflict.

This story in Matthew is in fact two mini parables cleverly combined into one.

In the first the King who has prepared a banquet for his Son sends slaves out to tell those invited that the banquet is ready.

The invitation is rejected with weak excuses by those who choose not to go.

The guests have better and more important things to do.

Responsibility and commitment to God, takes second place.

The king sends the slaves again.

The verses repeat and expand on the preceding invitation, describing the lavish banquet prepared.

The emphasis now on eschatological fulfilment.

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Kingdom

'Bulls and fattened cattle slaughtered', the banquet meal ready.
In Matthews mind John the Baptist, Jesus,
And his disciples.

The invitation is rejected but this time the slaves are seized and shamefully killed.
Brings to mind again John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples.

The king responds to the rejected Call to ungrateful, wicked people by sending soldiers to
destroy them and burn their cities.

Matthew, maybe recalls the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).

Giving emphasis on the unworthy nature of those invited.

The parable explores the consequences for the future of the Jewish people who obstruct
the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

The king sends the remaining slaves again.

The call this time goes out to any who will come. (v9)

The righteous with the unrighteous

Tax collectors, sinners, gentiles, all.....

This is now the counterpart to letting out the vineyard to other tenants in the preceding
parable.

The result in both cases is Israel losing its privileged position.

As it says in Matthew 19

'Many who are first will be last and the last will be first', (Matt 19:30)

At this point a second mini parable introduces the problem of an improperly dressed guest.
This is a Matthean addition to the parable not present in Luke with an emphasis on
righteousness.

It is a tough couple of verses because they relate to the treatment of the man who appears
to be improperly dressed.

Like our little girls perception of the Groom when she says:

'Why is he in black?'

In Matthew, the guest at the banquet is not wearing appropriate clothing.

Cast your thoughts to Revelation 19

At the marriage of the lamb, the bride is granted

'fine linen, bright and pure', the robes of righteousness.

Paul in Philippians 4 emphasises the need to rejoice, give thanks to the Lord for his
provision and hold fast to God's statutes of righteousness.

This guest is not robed in righteousness, not content to keep God's statutes and speechless,
without excuse.

The king pronounces judgment and casts him out.

The unwelcome guest - The Jewish leadership.

Those who deny God's call from Jesus.

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Kingdom

There is; it says

‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’.

There is much then us to consider in this parable and there are some troubling reflections.

The righteous still suffer and the wicked sometimes prevail.

Matthew tells us that many are called but few are chosen.

There is a sobering reminder that discipleship is not about power and authority but righteousness, sacrifice and humility.

Our chosen-ness is something we have to be true too.

But the righteous do suffer, the wicked don't seem to go away, not in this parable, not in Philippians 4, not in psalm 23, not in Isaiah and not for us today.

But, the presence of the Lord is always here with the eternal promise made that mourning and crying will be no more always with us.

Later in our service one of George Herbert's poems 'The Call' will be sung by the choir.

The poem tells us of God's Feast.

The Lord invites us all to come in to taste and see that the Lord is good.

His feast, will leave us hungry to know him more and more.

Some 30yrs ago the Lord invited me, at a really difficult time, a tragic time, to make myself at home at his side and trust him, to have faith and walk with him.

And as I did my hunger to know him more grew and grew.

That was certainly true for me and I hope that is the same for you as well.

There is so much to learn about our Lord and the Kingdom of Heaven,

So, as we listen to our choir sing the anthem during the Communion,

Ponder on the words the poem.

Ponder on the words of Paul, psalm 23 and Matthew

Ponder on the little girl who wonders why we dress our groom is not in white.

Ponder longest on the privilege of God's eternal promise

Received through Jesus sacrifice on the Cross, the body and blood of Christ, the Eucharist, the eternal promise of the kingdom of Heaven.

As I read and later as the choir sing

Ponder the words and let them feed you with confidence in your faith:

The Call:

Come my Way, my Truth, my Life:

Such a Way, as give us breath:

Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
And such a life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as - joys - in - love.

Amen