

Christians who have become elitists and have rejected Jesus' invitation to all people to come into the kingdom.

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Related topics

For further study:

Reign of God; ecumenism; social teaching of the church; creation (dignity of all creation); cost of discipleship; paschal mystery; mystery of suffering; eschatology; last judgement; social sin; foundations of morality; conversion; evangelisation

Closing Prayer

God, to whose eternal banquet
the whole world is summoned as your guest;
keep us mindful of your call to holiness,
and clothe us in the practice of good works,
so that we, the last and least
of those you have invited,
may not come unprepared,
but may be welcome at your table
and rejoice in your salvation.
We make this prayer through Jesus Christ,
your Son, our Saviour for ever and ever.

Collect for Proper 23, Year A³

Proper 23

(Sunday between 9 and 15 October inclusive)

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 25.1-9	Praise for the power and plan of God
Psalms 23	The Lord's my shepherd
Philippians 4.1-9	A call to unity, prayer and good actions
Matthew 22.1-14	Parable of the wedding banquet

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Parable of the wedding feast

¹Once more Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again 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." ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend,

² <http://sio.midco.net/danelson9/yeara/proper23a.htm>

³ *Celebrating the Christian Year : Prayers and Resources for Sundays, Holy Days and Festivals, Years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-2005.

how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.” ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Matthew 22.1-14 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

This is the third of three parables we have been hearing in our readings over the last three Sundays about the kingdom of God, which is one of the principal themes of Matthew’s gospel.

There is a temptation in any organisation to lose sight of what was the original motivation and to become complacent. Perhaps this was why Matthew selected these particular parables.

In ordinary circumstances it would be considered an honour to receive an invitation to a great wedding banquet. Those who are invited in the parable, however, treat it rather lightly – they have things to do which are more important to them. Can you think of examples where unimportant matters are given greater prominence than what is really more important?

Some commentators think that one of Matthew’s aims is to support the idea of the Christian church as the new Israel, the rightful guests of the King, to use the terms of this parable. On this understanding the slaves stand for the apostles and prophets, and those who were originally invited stand for the old Israel – they are not ready and they are deemed not worthy. Perhaps the city that is burnt down (v.7) represents the destruction of the Temple. After the refusals of the people who were originally invited, others are called to come to the banquet, not all of whom are reputable. Is this a helpful understanding of the parable? Can it be applied to the church today? How would it feel to be a ‘slave’ gathering ‘both good and bad’ (v.10)?

God’s reign is not what people expect. The well-heeled and the well-connected, although initially invited, fail to understand the significance of the invitation, and so fail to turn up for the great party. Instead, it is people on the streets who are found – those who would not expect to be invited to a royal wedding banquet – and so the wedding hall is filled with guests of a different sort.

The parable about the royal wedding is followed by another

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

section. Is this part of the same parable, or a separate parable? It is not present in the similar parable in Luke’s gospel (Luke 14.16-24).

One person among the guests is not wearing a wedding robe (v.11); he is questioned and expelled. Who does he represent? Perhaps he is someone who has accepted the invitation with a bad or critical attitude; perhaps he is someone who is insufficiently humble or grateful; or someone who becomes a disciple of Christ but does not take this commitment seriously ... Can you think of any other reasons?

Quotations

1

Jesus is aware that his teaching makes great demands. The reign of God is like a pearl of immense value, which a merchant might sacrifice all his assets to obtain (Matt. 13.46). For the disciple who wants the life of the coming age it is not enough to keep the commandments; he must sell all and give to the poor (Mark 10.21). Response to God’s love allows no compromise. The opposition to Jesus will inevitably be reflected in persecution of the disciples. They too must take up their cross and be ready to lose their life in order to save it (Mark 8.34-36).

We Believe in God / Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England. 1987. ch.5

2

Whatever can this wedding garment be, then? For an answer we must go to the Apostle, who says: ‘The purpose of our command is to arouse the love that springs from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith.’

There is your wedding garment. It is not love of just any kind. Many people of bad conscience appear to love one another, but you will not find in them ‘the love that springs from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith’. Only that kind of love is the wedding garment.

St Augustine of Hippo, 354–430.
Sermon 90,1. 5-6: PL 38, 559. 561-563

3

Historically, the parable has been read as a repudiation of Israel and Judaism in favor of Gentiles and Christians. However, we must remember that Matthew is not writing his Gospel for the non-Christian community. He is writing for Christians, and here specifically for