

An Open Invitation

A message on St. Matthew's Gospel 22:1-14

Open our ears, **O Lord**, to hear your word and know **Your Voice**. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our will; that we may **serve You** this **day** and **always**. Amen

Have you ever received an invitation to a party you really did not want to attend?

What did you do in that situation?

I am sure you did not **mistreat**, **abuse**, or **murder** the mailman. That is what happened in this parable. Maybe Jesus was giving it a hyperbole (magnification).

Have you ever invited people to your party who did not attend? I am sure you have come across such times...

You **cleaned**, you **cooked**, you **decorated** the food and your home. The table was set, the candles were lit, the music was soothing. Everything was ready but some of the guests did not arrive. Did it make you so angry that you killed them and burned their houses down? Certainly not, but that is what happened in this parable we heard today. Maybe Jesus was giving it a hyperbole.

This parable of a King's Son's Wedding is so **outrageous**, so **shocking**, that it begs to be taken seriously; not literally though. **It begs to be taken as truth; but not as a historical fact.** Besides, to hear this parable and conclude that God is an angry king who, if he does not get his way, destroys his own people and burns their cities it simply does not fit with the God revealed by Jesus throughout the four Holy Gospels.

If we tell that story as it is in the Holy Gospel as truth; I think Jesus might call us liars. No doubt, this is a parable of judgment, but it may not be the judgment we think it is.

Speaking about the first group of guests the king says, "Those invited were not worthy." By implication those in the second-invited group were worthy. We tend to get nervous and fearful when God begins to make judgments. It leaves us wondering whether we are in the first group or the second. **Are we unworthy or are we worthy?**

I suspect our nervousness and fear about God's judgments arise from the assumption that God judges us in the same way as we so often judge others. More often than not our judgments of others are **judgments of exclusion**.

- What if it is just the opposite with God?
- What if Jesus is trying to shock us into seeing that the kingdom of heaven is not business as usual according to our standards?
- What if God's judgment on our lives is one of **grace, acceptance, and invitation**; a judgment of **inclusion**?

If that is true, then what separates or distinguishes the first-invited guests from the second?

- The **first** difference is not that one was more deserving than the other. The first-invited guests were the recipients of the king's invitation and favour. But so were the second-invited guests. And so was the man who showed up without a wedding robe. **They were all invited.** They were all favoured. None of them had done anything to earn or deserve an invitation. It was just given. **If that is true for them, it is true for us.**
- The **second** difference is not that the king likes one group more than the other group. His sole motivation is to share his banquet. **He wants someone, anyone, everyone, to join in his joy and celebration, and be a part of his kingdom and life.** Both groups were given the same opportunity. **If that is true for them, it is true for us.**
- The **third** difference is not that some guests are good and others are bad. There is no distinction or judgment made based upon behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, or morals. To the contrary, with the second round of invitations the king sends his servants into the main streets with the instruction to "invite everyone you find." And they did. They "went out into the streets and **gathered all whom they found, both good and bad.**" If that is true for them, it is true for us.

That is probably not the kind of social life most of us live, offering to another, or receiving from another. But the parable is talking about God's kingdom not ours.

- So what is it?
- What is the difference between those who were not worthy and those who were?

There is only one thing that distinguishes the first-invited guests from the second-invited guests. Their **Presence**. The second-invited guests showed up; while the first-invited guests did not. The "wedding hall was filled" with the second-invited guests but **the first-invited guests "would not come."** That is the only difference between the two groups.

The key to our life in our Heavenly Father is to just show up, to be present.

That is a lot easier said than done. **To be present is difficult work.** Think how difficult it is to be present to another person.

1. It means establishing the other person **as your priority.**
2. It means **seeing them for who they are** and not who we want them to be.
3. It means **opening ourselves to receive** their life into our own.
4. It means the **exposure of entrusting and giving our life** to the other.
5. It means really **listening to what they say** and not what we want to hear.
6. It means letting go **of our own agendas, distractions, fears, and prejudices.**
7. It means **bringing and offering all that we are and all that we have.**

If we are not doing that with others **we are probably not doing it with God.**

Instead, we too often go our separate ways, to our farms, our businesses and our professions. We are too **busy**, too **exhausted**, too **distracted**. There is work to be done and money to be made. We make light of the other person's life and what is being offered. If we do not earn it or work for it, we assume it has no value. After all, you get what you pay for. We are convinced we have better things to do and better places to be in. **That is what the first-invited group did.**

What they did not realize, and what we sometimes do not realize, is **that there is no life outside the banquet of the kingdom.**

To show up and to be present is to be worthy before God. **It is as simple that... and it is that difficult.** We do not earn or prove our worthiness as a condition to entering the banquet. **We show up, be present, and discover for ourselves the worthiness that God has always seen and known about us.** That is when our lives begin to change.

But what about the man who showed up without a wedding robe?

This is about more than just a dress code violation. Something else was missing. "He was speechless." **It was as if he was not really there.** Jesus is reminding us that there are times when we show up but **we are not really present.** **Our body is there but we have left the room** – it often happens when we have to listen to a long winded sermon. You may have experienced it and maybe some of you are experiencing it right now.

So here is what I wonder.

What if this man had **said** something, anything?

What if he had just made **his presence known**, not so much to the king but to himself?

What if he had said:

- I was **hungry**.
- I was **lonely**.
- I was **thirsty**.
- I was **naked**.
- I was **sad and grieving**.
- I was **empty**.
- I was **dying**.

What if he had said any one of those or a thousand others things like them?

Why did he not take that the first step?

Had he acted and taken the first step, it would have been enough. I am sure, the King would have shown up before him with all that he had in his command. Then the king would have said to him, “Oh, my dear friend, I am so glad you got my invitation and **took time to be present**. I am so glad you are here; **you are truly worthy**.”

- Do we accept our Lord’s Invitation?
- Do we act in accordance with the instructions in that Invitation?
- Do we give more importance to our earthly demands?
- Have we made our God, our Heavenly Father, just a one hour; one-day in the week formality?

Do ponder on these points...

And now, unto **God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost** be ascribed all **might, majesty, power, and dominion** as is most justly due this day; both now and forever; world without end.

Amen