

Sunday 15th October 2017 – Trinity 18 – P23

Over the course of our lives we will no doubt receive many invitations to all sorts of different functions.

Some invitations received, may well be because we hold a particular position in society or because we are a member of a particular group. Most invitations we receive will perhaps be sent to us because we are part of a large family where all sorts of different celebrations take place over time.

Other invitations might be less formal, coming from friends whom we have known for a period of time, where we have built up a special relationship with them, and with whom we enjoy being in their company, because that particular friendship means a lot to us.

Having received an invitation, we will no doubt check whether if a date is suggested on the invitation, we

are free to accept it. We might also consider whether it is an event we actually wish to attend. In some cases, it might even be that we will delay responding to the invitation in case we get a better offer!

I am sure that your first reactions to an invitation received will perhaps be similar to one of those I have mentioned, and no doubt you will have your own ‘response’ agenda to invitations received.

In Luke’s Gospel account of today’s Gospel reading, (Ch14 v 16-24) we might even use one of those excuses in various forms – I’ve purchased a field or more likely perhaps planning to move to or decorate a new house. Perhaps even getting married ourselves or marking an important wedding anniversary as David & Edna and Jenny & myself did yesterday, but probably not bought five oxen! We can of course in all cases, either accept or reject such invitations.

In our Gospel reading set for today we have Jesus comparing the ‘Kingdom of God’ to a ‘Wedding Banquet.’

In Mark’s version of this parable we have a much more straightforward narrative about the failure of those originally invited to realise the value of the invitation. One of the main differences between the Matthew version and that in Mark’s Gospel is the tone of the narrative.

Matthew’s version of the story is full of urgency and bitter anger and it is only in Matthew’s version that the banquet is completely ready and about to go to waste if not consumed - it is only in Matthew’s Gospel that the messengers are mistreated and vengeance exacted.

Part of the anger in the story is generated by the King **demanding** that they actually attend.

Those now invited to the feast, which we can assume was made known some time previously, suddenly find something more important to be doing. Those invited are obviously not now interested in attending the feast, for they have other things on their mind.

The innocent messenger even finds himself beaten up for his trouble. However, pity the son in whose honour the banquet is being held – their future King! They do not seem to see the relevance for themselves in the son or what is now about to take place.

Further anger is generated by the urgency of the moment. Twice the King says that everything is ready. It cannot wait, the food will not keep it will be spoiled. It's now or never.

The invitation has already been given, why do those invited not realise that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to go to a royal wedding?

Today's parable, together with those in the previous chapter are all about the way in which Jesus' hearers are passing up their chance to share in the Kingdom that is now being proclaimed by him.

The stories told by Jesus get more pointed as they relate to himself and the Kingdom of God - both of which are inseparable – they belong to each other.

To reject Jesus is to reject the Kingdom of God – you cannot have the one without the other.

The Pharisees, to whom these stories are directed, just cannot accept that Jesus is the Key to the Kingdom.

They understand what is being said to them, but they do not believe it. They are unable to accept that Jesus, in their eyes an ordinary human being, can know more than they do.

For it is the Pharisees who are responsible for the tradition, and for its interpretation – they alone are

authorised and have the right to interpret scripture and no one else. At this stage they have no conception who Jesus is, or what the consequences of ignoring his teachings will have on their own fate.

And what about the man without a wedding garment? He had been swept up by the King's slaves with everyone else and now finds himself enjoying a King's feast!

But poor chap, he is suddenly confronted by the King, who notices that he is not properly dressed, and asks him first in a friendly manner how he had managed to get invited without wearing the proper clothing for the occasion. Dumbstruck the guest misses the opportunity to explain how he came to be there and so is promptly removed from the chamber.

Perhaps like the people who rejected the initial invitation, this guest is not interested in his

relationship with the King. He never perhaps expected or wanted to meet or speak with the King and does not concern himself as to what the banquet is being held for, but is happy to enjoy a free meal! We ourselves can of course reject Jesus' invitation for all sorts of different reasons, some of which I have already mentioned at the beginning of this sermon. No one is forcing us or anyone else to accept the invitation, but to refuse what is being offered will in the end and can only in the end be our responsibility. The fact is, that however knowledgeable we or others might be in biblical terms about Jesus, Jesus' various teachings may well continue to challenge us afresh in different ways, each time we encounter them afresh. Throughout our lives, if we will allow it, we are being encouraged to extend the boundaries of our thinking, to the extent that we are regularly being surprised by

God. The teachings of Jesus in general, require us to put those teachings into action. So, Jesus concludes our Gospel reading for today with those words which should give us food for thought today –

‘Many are called but few are chosen’.

This is Matthew’s sombre warning to us all today – that unless we have come to rejoice with the son, and respond to his teachings, there may be nothing for us here.

We have heard in our reading from Philippians the words of Paul confidently proclaiming his faith. He concludes by saying that forgetting the past, he is ‘straining’ forward to the future – ‘toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus’.

As we have prayed in the collect set for today – ‘forsaking what lies behind, and reaching out to that which is before, may we run the way of your

commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy'.

Perhaps sometime during this week, while we are perhaps having a coffee break, let us look again at the Gospel and other readings set for today, and reflect on what new things God might be saying to us through them. After all, we are all invited to the banquet, and what's more its free.

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