

YOU'RE INVITED TO A WEDDING MATTHEW 22: 1-14

Today in the parable Jesus invites us to a very expensive royal wedding. He says:

"the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son."

Now, if you or I got an invitation to a royal wedding you could bet your coronation crown most of us would be there, so what could go wrong?

To put it into context, It's a slightly odd wedding. The King has invited us to the wedding banquet for his son. Yet unfortunately we've all decided that the Bridal registry is all too expensive and travelling to the kingdom is like travelling anywhere in the Riverina – it's too far to go. Thus, we don't go, none of us! But the King has a plan and decides instead to invite a homeless man from off the streets. Clearly the King is a little bit surprised that the man is not appropriately dressed for the occasion and thus orders his housekeeping staff to bind him and toss him back out in the dark, , much to the man's great anger, extreme disappointment, and great regret.

Now we might think that this King is just a strange, rude, unkind man, full of himself after all, this is unexpected behaviour of the king toward one of the guests. Is this really what Jesus is describing that the kingdom of heaven is like?

It's abit of a shock and surprise this parable, as it was to those who were those listening to Jesus. As in many cultures, hospitality was especially important to these people. It would have been unforgivable for guests or hosts to behave in this manner. Jesus' listeners would have been shocked and offended and especially so when Jesus compared this story to the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps that was the point. Jesus often made unusual or surprising or uncomfortable comparisons in his parables. Once again, he is challenging the assumptions of us his listeners, shocking us with this surprising and unexpected story. Why would he tell such a story about the kingdom of heaven?

Well Jesus intention in this story is to help us to understand the differences between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven. The wedding banquet is a metaphor for the messianic banquet that we will enjoy with Christ

in the kingdom of heaven. As he invited guests into this Kingdom then, we are to offer no excuses, but with our whole strength, mind, body, and soul, accept the invitation. It is an invitation that calls for action not seen for its inconvenience. But like the invitees in this story, many of us at times find it easy to accept Christ in principle, but like them, we find it less easy to accept the particulars—Christ's call to serve, spread the gospel message in our community, make disciples, invite a co-worker or a neighbour to church—or to tithe. This is the gritty reality of our calling as Christians, yet all too often we're sorely tempted to reserve our discipleship for the parts of life that don't require us to change—that don't force us out of our comfort zone.

Therefore, this story wasn't just for shock value. Rather Jesus wanted to expand people's / our perceptions. Therefore, what He is saying that the kingdom of heaven is beyond our expectations, beyond our assumptions, beyond what we can analyse and think through and get our heads around. In other words, get the images of St Peter and the pearly gates on white fluffy cloud images out of your heads.

This is not to say that we should not think or try to understand. It is only to say God will always surprise us. In experiencing God in our lives there is always more than what we can see, and he will always confront us with the unexpected. The point in this parable is that God desires us to always try to be open to more, rather than rest in the comfortable assumption that we know all about God.

Who knows what God has planned for us – or plans for us to do. But are we open to it when it comes? This is what faith is. Faith is receiving the invitation and going, it requires being open to putting our hope our trust in what we can't see sometimes ahead for us whether the journey ahead is comfortable or uncomfortable.

These stories make us uncomfortable. Yet in this instance Jesus is being deliberately provocative. Today he is challenging our preconceived ideas or favourite ideas about what God and Gods kingdom are like. We all have our favourite ideas of what the kingdom of heaven might be like. Jesus is telling us that it will be like nothing we can imagine. In that over-used phrase, Jesus is inviting us to think outside the box. Because the truth is that we cannot know for certain. In the book of Isaiah, it says:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."

This doesn't mean God considers us to be stupid, but simply it means that we are human, and our knowledge and our understanding are limited. Even though we contain a spark of the divine, even though we are made in God's image, we are not God. The most we can hope for in this lifetime are glimpses through story and scripture, through prayer and meditation, through our experiences. If we are open to the Spirit, if we listen, if we pay attention, we can catch a glimpse here and there of the kingdom.

These are the glimpses Paul speaks of in the Letter to the Philippians when he says:

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

And the only things Paul left out of his list might be whatever is surprising, whatever is unexpected and be thankful.

"Rejoice in the Lord always"

and be thankful for all the expected and unexpected ways he reveals the kingdom of God to us, the green pastures and still waters, the paths of righteousness through shadows of death, for it's often through those things that God speaks to us.

Are you one who welcomes them with open arms, or do you throw them out in the dark?

The Lord be with you.