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The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Matthew 22. 1-14

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

‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. Then 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.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

I remember very well an occasion when I was helping to lead a youth conference on ‘Inclusion’ in St. Albans Abbey and it went on until very late at night. The Abbey is well heated, so, as it was winter, there were some homeless people who had crept in for the warmth. One of these got so involved in what was going on that he tried to join in the final ‘inclusive’ circle. But, as much as he tried, the youngsters shied away from taking his hand and admitting him to the circle. They had been full of righteous thoughts in theory, but, when it came to doing something practical, their deep-rooted prejudice held them back.

Today’s passage is one of several about whom the kingdom of God is for. We know in our hearts that we need to include the poor, the lonely, the sick, the refugee, the outsider, but it’s hard, isn’t it? They aren’t like us. They are different. They frighten us. They put us on edge. They make us feel tense.

How tough it must have been for the disciples to see Jesus go to a leper and embrace him before healing him! It’s so much easier to welcome someone who looks like us, who talks like us, who

dresses like us.

But we are told again and again that the Kingdom of God is for the excluded, the outsider, the minority figure and those are the people we should be focusing on. That's what today's parable means. Those who already have plenty are complacent and unwilling to put themselves out. 'What's mine is mine and I'll keep it!' would be their motto. The Christian motto is the one of the Good Samaritan – 'What's mine is yours and I'll share it!'

Nevertheless, Jesus always surprises us and he does so at the end of this parable, when the guest came in without a wedding robe. Full entry to the Kingdom of God depends on sincere change of life. We can't just give lip-service to God.

What can I give him? Give my heart!'

Andy Morton

Your hands, O Lord, in days of old
were strong to heal and save;
they triumphed over pain and death,
o'er darkness and the grave.
To you they went, the blind, the mute,
the palsied and the lame,
the leper set apart and shunned,
the sick and those in shame.

And then your touch brought life and health,
gave speech and strength and sight;
and youth renewed, with health restored,
claimed you, the Lord of light.
And so, O Lord, be near to bless,
almighty now as then,
in every street, in every home,
in every troubled friend.

O be our mighty healer still,
O Lord of life and death;
restore and strengthen, soothe and bless
with your almighty breath.
On hands that work and eyes that see,
your healing wisdom pour,
that whole and sick and weak and strong
may praise you evermore.

