



Pentecost 20A (Proper 23)

Sunday, October 11, 2026

RCL: Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106: 1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; **Matthew 22:1-14**

Opening Prayer |

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Context |

Jesus offers this story during the final week of his life, lending it particular weight. It follows Jesus's celebrated entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, and the cursing of the fig tree, as well as the parable of the two sons (which appears in every Gospel) and that of the wicked tenants who ultimately kill the son of their landowner (which appears only in Matthew). Interestingly, all three of these parables feature fathers and sons, and invitations of various types being rejected or accepted. Through these reiterated stories, Jesus is warning his listeners of the necessity of obedience, with clear warnings that failure to accept this new way God has made will have dire consequences.

The use of the banquet as a metaphor for a coming, new age is a common trope throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. It would appear obvious to Matthew's readers that in this image, Jesus is offering a description of how God invites people to enter into a new way: the Kingdom of God on earth. There are no minced words here; Jesus uses powerful images to urge people to respond to the invitation rightly.

Theological Reflection |

In these lines, the banquet being offered is not merely a meal, but specifically a wedding feast. Jesus has previously spoken of himself as a bridegroom (Matthew 9:15), and in this tale, the father of the groom just happens to be the king—again, a reference the listeners (and we readers) can take to mean God. When the original invitees are called, they refuse to come. This is shocking, considering the status of the one offering the invitation. The king's response, in turn, is also rather remarkable; he sends his slaves to try again, endeavoring to entice the invitees with descriptions of the lavish abundance of the banquet that has been

prepared. It is as if the king thinks perhaps that the people just do not understand how wonderful this banquet will be. He seeks to persuade them to change their minds.

The invitees respond with astonishing indifference. Some “make light of it,” heading back to their farms and homes (images that stand in for their occupations and personal relationships). Others, however, respond brutally to this beautiful invitation: Those who are trying to draw them into the king’s bounty are “seized,” “mistreated,” and finally “killed.”

The king is furious. His military is sent to the offenders, and the story goes on to relate how the city of murderers is, in turn, destroyed.

With those guests dispatched, the invitation to the banquet of abundance extends beyond those close enough to the king to be invited in the first round. Now it includes anyone and everyone found along the main roads. Will anyone dare refuse the king this time around?

The king’s servants now offer not so much an invitation as a compulsion: “Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad.” In this dualism, we may be reminded of the parable of the wheat and tares, in which the tares sown by an enemy are allowed by the landowner to grow alongside the purposefully-planted wheat, lest tearing them up destroy the desired harvest. Good and bad are brought in together.

Yet the story does not end here. While the hall is full and it seems the king’s desire has been fulfilled, one guest is brought to our attention: the one who is not wearing attire fit for a wedding. The king looks over the assembled crowd and approaches the man with what seems to be a kind reference, calling him “friend.” Then he turns, questioning how this man has entered the room without the necessary clothing. No answer is given. He orders the man bound and thrown “into outer darkness” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—a common Matthean description of the destination of those who displease God.

While the parable has the guest condemned for not wearing a “wedding gown,” during the time of this Gospel’s writing, wedding guests were expected simply to be clean and appropriate—specific attire was not required. In contemplating this parable, the early church and its theologians understood and described the wedding gown as referring to the works of faith—charity, obedience, love, etc. It is interesting to note this puts the emphasis not on the guest’s ability to purchase something (which may or may not have been possible), but to act in a particular way.

What can we make of this? The depiction of the king is not entirely flattering; indeed, it can be downright confusing. How are we (or are we?) to understand this king as connected to Jesus of Nazareth? What role can we imagine ourselves playing in the story it sketches? What might we learn about our own responses to God through the progression of the king’s invitations?

Discussion Questions |

- How does your own response to the invitation of God fit into the examples the parable shows?

- How do the king’s various responses and interactions with people correspond to what you believe, or what the church at large believes, about the ways of God? What do they challenge?
- What do you understand to be the “wedding feast” to which God invites you?
- How is the Spirit drawing your attention as you consider what it means for you, yourself, to be clothed—or not—in a “wedding gown” at the banquet of the Lord?

Faith in Practice |

Consider offering an invitation of your own: to a feast of friendship! It needn’t be lavish (though it could be). Who will you invite? What will you prepare? How will you respond if they decline? Give yourself an opportunity to play the part of host and see what you learn.

***Misty Krasawski** is a nominee for holy orders in the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee. Previously, she earned a Master of Letters in Bible and the Contemporary World from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. She has eight children ages 16-33, three daughters- and one son-in-law, as well as four grandchildren, and has spent decades in ministry to children, youth, and mothers with Whole Heart Ministries and in her local church. She would love to spend more time exploring the intersections of maternity, theology, and feminism, and believes that better theology helps us all move toward a better world.*



Sermons that Work and Bible Studies that Work are a joint offering of Forward Movement and The Office of Communication at The Episcopal Church.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible-study/>

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons-that-work>