

21st Sunday After Pentecost, October 9, 2005, Liturgical Year "A"

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, New York

The Rev. Deacon John E. Commins, Curate Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

One Size Fits All – NOT!

Have you ever given a party – and nobody came?

As an 8th grade student of a Parochial School on Long Island, I was very active in sports and involved in a lot of social activities, but I was also the youngest member of a very active family in the church. Despite the fact that I was a regular invitee and attended most of the parties, when I threw a party for my classmates – it was somehow mistakenly viewed with much suspicion. The Pastor had just recently warned the 8th grade that all parties must be properly chaperoned, and in short - he read us the riot act – real fire and brimstone.

Well, along comes my invitation to my thirty some classmates – who figure that my party is just a kind of "set up," and that somehow the priest would be watching. Then on the night of the party - only my three closest friends showed up.

I was crushed, humiliated, hurt and rejected. No matter what the reason was for them not coming – I still felt scorned – and angry. I must say I can really relate with the parable of the king who threw the wedding banquet for his son – and no one came. And so with that awareness of hurt and rejection we will take a closer look at today's Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Two Viewpoints:

Another version of this parable is also given by Luke (14:16-24). In it Luke speaks of the original guests refusing the invitation, and the poor being brought in, pointing to the rejection of the kingdom by the Jewish leaders and the acceptance of the invitation by the Gentiles.

In Matthew's Gospel we find a very rich illustration of Jesus telling us of the wedding banquet given by a king for his son. It is steeped in the very Word of God. In Scripture, God is often presented as the husband of his people, and Christ as the bridegroom and his final coming as the consummation of his marriage with his people – His church. The wedding banquet of this parable refers to the coming of the kingdom both now and in its future fulfillment – and the arrival of the Messiah.

The attitudes of some of those initially invited has got to be seen in the light of the hostile attitudes of the chief priests and pharisees, and ties in very strongly with the preceding parable of the wicked tenant farmers in Matthew 21:33-43 – who killed the son of the owner of the vineyard. Because of the rejection by the invited guests – the king has his servants go and gather both the good and the bad into the banquet.

One Size Fits All?

Unfortunately we live in a "**One size fits all**" society, and because of that "*inclusive worldview*" many people stop right here in the message – and say "**See, God invites all to His table – both good and bad**" - forgetting, - no – not wanting to know about the judgment on the wicked, or about demanding standards of holiness, or even about weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some want to hear this as a story about God throwing a huge party for everyone – being inclusive to all, letting everyone in– no matter what – without looking at the rest of the story.

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With a **"One size fits all" worldview** - there is no thought that there are choices to be made – and that **actions DO have consequences.**

- **Moral choices DO matter!**

We do not live in a world of "Etch a Sketch" where, when we are done playing and making things our way – that all we have to do is shake the board, erasing everything, and start all over later.

A Historical View:

This parable deals with the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day, and the rejection of God's Son – refusing the invitation to the party that God had been planning throughout history – salvation history. The Messiah was there – right in front of them, and they didn't want to know. The original messengers – the prophets – who told of His coming were killed and abused by those who were invited.

But, this parable also transcends time from life in the first century, leading us to life today – and how we are to respond.

Jesus tells us that God sends out new messengers –

- and that even tax collectors,
- sinners,
- and those on "the fringes" who thought they were forgotten are now invited.

God's message is for them as well. God's new messengers – Christian believers in the Body of Christ, are to carry His invitation to others – even those who believe in "One size fits all."

But here is where our responses come to the major difference, to the fork in the road – to "where the rubber meets the road." (*Forgive me - I just couldn't resist using that phrase.*)

Many hear this "wide-open" invitation as

- *"come as you are"*
- and *"God Loves You and He wants you to stay that way"* –
- **not wanting you to change.**

I am sorry but this argument just doesn't work! This argument only serves to justify whatever behavior you feel like doing and making it all right – so you don't have to change.

Repentance and sin never enter the equation.

The idea to change the church –and make it "One size fits all" doesn't work either. Quoting from the Life Application Bible Commentary:

"In this parable, invitations are delivered to the whole range of people. The Christian church is multicultural, multicolor, multilingual, and multiethnic. Make no mistake. No nation or personality type has a lock on the gate to heaven. Lots of different kinds of people will be there. As a result ...

- *Open your church to the wider world.*
- *Develop programs to meet a wider set of needs.*
- *Consider worship services in minority languages.*
- *Learn simple hymns from other continents.*
- *Open your heart to people different from yourself. This may be the hardest of all, but if you succeed, the rest will follow.*

Let God expand your heart, and sure enough, the church will become a warmer place for strangers"

This is an admirable message – and does indeed hold *some* truth - but coming from a “One size fits all” mentality - **it is missing any point of personal transformation, of changing behavior or lifestyle – and certainly missing the Gospel and Lordship of Jesus Christ as head of the church.** Being an accommodating church is one thing: such as adding bilingual worship, welcoming all Baptized Christians to the Lord’s Table, or putting in a ramp and moving pews for the handicapped, **but completely altering the makeup and beliefs of the church to fit the culture is wrong – it is “One Size Fits All.”**

The way to Christ is not in changing the church, but in surrendering one’s life to the Lordship of Christ, and truly having that life changed by Christ. Diversity is only part of the story. A transformation through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life brings about the completion, and culmination of one’s story.

The Lord Heals and Transforms Us:

When the woman who was bleeding reached and touched the fringe of Jesus’ cloak, Jesus didn’t say to her “You’ve been hemorrhaging for twelve years – you’re unclean – have a nice day.” Instead Jesus said to her **“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”** (Matthew 9:22) She was instantly changed, transformed, and made clean.

When the “Man on the Mat” was lowered through the roof of the house in Capernaum, Jesus’ immediate reaction was not to find him a comfy spot on the floor – but instead to say **“Son, your sins are forgiven.”** (Matthew 9:2)

When the scribes started to complain, Jesus asked **“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’”** He was illustrating that His transforming words would have been complete either way, and that the man on the mat would be changed – forever. That man was changed healed and transformed with Jesus’ words, and he got up and he went home.

“When the blind and the lame came to Jesus, He didn’t say “You’re all right as you are.” Instead - His love reached them where they were, but His love REFUSED to let them stay as they were. Jesus’ love wants the best for His beloved – and so their lives were healed, changed, and transformed.

I truly believe that no one thinks or believes that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are – for God loves all humanity. We are created in His image (Genesis 1:27) and He loves us. In fact, God loves mankind so much “that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.’” (John 3:16-17)

God loves sinners – and all of heaven rejoices - when they repent.

- God loves the ruthless,
- the arrogant,
- the abusive,
- the manipulative,
- the murderer
- and the thief –

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but the point of God's love is that He wants them to change. God detests these behaviors and He declares them as abominations. He hates what these sinners are doing and the effect they have on everyone else – and upon themselves.

Let's face the truth: God is a good God, a loving God, a righteous, and a just God, and He cannot allow this sort of behavior or person, if they don't change, to remain forever in the eternal celebration feast that He is throwing for His Son. Regret is not good enough – and only sincere repentance merits the forgiveness that His love can give. When the adulteress, about to be stoned to death was brought to Jesus He didn't say "You're all right as you are" but instead "*Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.*" (John 8:11) (some translations say "*Go and sin no more!*")

A cynical "**One size fits all**" society looks at the end of this parable of the wedding banquet and asks "where did all of the other guests get the wedding clothes from?" "How did they have time to change clothes?" It might also ask "why this one man should get thrown out because he didn't have the right thing to wear?" The argument might possibly be made that this is a classic case of social exclusion, rather than inclusion. After all – **what is this - No shirt, no shoes, no service?**

Clothed in Christ:

No, it is nothing of the sort. Remember, the wedding banquet that Jesus is describing in this parable is God's Kingdom.

We might look at the garments or wedding robes as an outward expression of what a person is like inside.

- St. Paul describes accepting Jesus as Lord in Galatians 3:27 "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*"
- And Paul makes the point of a personal transformation even clearer in his letter to the Ephesians (4:22-24) "*You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*"
- It is by the grace, generosity, and transforming love of God that anyone at all would, or could be present at the banquet.
- God's Kingdom is a kingdom in which **love, justice, truth, mercy, and holiness reign unhindered.**

These things – love, justice, truth, mercy, and holiness - are the clothes that are needed to be worn at the wedding feast. It is because of Jesus' death on the cross – taking on our sins – that we are able to be dressed in these garments – through His righteousness – if we allow Him to be the Lord of our lives.

If you refuse to put them on, then you are saying that you don't want to stay at the banquet.

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Remember, Jesus loves you the way you are, but in fact, He loves you so very much that He won't let you stay that way.