

Proper 23 Year A 2020
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
October 11, 2020

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

A parable about a banquet occurs in the gospels of Matthew and of Luke. Luke's version is gentler, less gory, than Matthew's. Today we have warfare, a murderous response, and "weeping and gnashing of teeth." We remember that we need to place a parable in its own place and time; it is also helpful for our modern ears to tell the parable in ... some new ways.

Slaves were sent to the "A-list" in the community to invite them to a banquet. Here is the response to the slaves, as captured by songwriter Sr. Miriam Theresa Winter:

I cannot come, I cannot come,
To the banquet
Don't trouble me now
I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow
I have fields and commitments
That cost me a sum
Please hold me excused I cannot come.

The first invitation yielded no wedding guests. Once the food was prepared, the invitation was extended again, with a horrific response. The slaves were tortured and killed. In retaliation, the king sent out troops, killed the A-list invitees and burned their towns. Diplomacy is not our strong suit.

However, there is a banquet that has been prepared and is ready for guests to enjoy it. Another group of slaves walked through the streets and outside of the town gates to issue invitations to the wedding. Another songwriter, in his song "Land of Hope and Glory," describes who might have said yes to the invitation to the banquet. From Bruce Springsteen, "the Boss:"

This train carries saints and sinners
This train carries losers and winners
This train carries whores and gamblers
This train carries lost souls
I said, this train carries broken-hearted

This train thieves and sweet souls departed
This train carries fools and kings
This train, all aboard

... where sunlight streams;
Oh meet me in a land of hope and dreams

Those who said yes to the banquet – those on Springsteen’s train – were the people with whom Jesus broke the class and political rules of the day by breaking bread with them, so it is through the eyes and heart of Jesus Christ that we can really see this parable. Jesus still breaks bread with all of us: fools, kings, sinners, powerless and powerful. We are all invited to the banquet, which is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus invites everyone – not only God’s covenanted people – but everyone to God’s kingdom. Some accept the invitation. Some say no; we are far too busy, have other priorities; we have fields and commitments.

Those who say yes to entering God’s kingdom, to living into that kingdom, must dress for the banquet. Saying “yes” and then not following Jesus’ teachings ... is like saying “no” to the invitation. Saying yes to Jesus not only at our baptism but throughout our whole lives is difficult; we fail to clothe ourselves in the mind of Jesus. What IS that wedding garment, the mind of Jesus?

We hear that answer from Paul, imprisoned in Rome:

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable ... think about these things.” This is our clothing for the kingdom of God. Think on excellence, Paul tells us. Think on these things, as you are, in fact, doing. Paul is encouraging the people of Philippi, and he is still encouraging us.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.” In a contentious world, in a uncertain time, let our gentleness show.

As much as the world needs our hope, and the world does need our hope, so to does it need to see gentleness to ourselves and to one another. Contention is all around us, but we do not have to join the fray; in fact, Jesus shows us another way: to love one another as Jesus loves us. Especially throughout this month, as election insults and tensions increase and the pandemic wreaks its own havoc, wear the garment that Paul describes, offering honesty, pureness of heart, those things that

are commendable and pleasing to God's heart. We have no need to enter the warfare that rages around us.

Come to the banquet, my friends, wherever God is finding you right now. Come to the banquet and enjoy the abundance of love, of the creation of God's kingdom right here on earth. The Lord has already dressed you, so come to the table of love.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.