

An Invitation to Change  
Matthew 22:1-14  
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Holy One in heaven, Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Good Morning.

Friends, know that you are not the only one who has begun to wonder, "What more can happen?" You are not alone, we are not alone. Though my words may echo in this empty, gracious chamber, a light shines in the darkness, a virgin had a baby, a man was crucified, died and rose again. Before that man, Jesus of Nazareth died, he showed us how to live. He rubbed mud on blind eyes and invited scarred, scared people to rinse the mud away and see. He chatted with lepers, dined with tax collectors, proclaimed that the poor among us are blessed, the meek will have the last word, those of us who are crying now, will laugh. He made so very clear that the people who were ignored, judged, and ostracized by the ways of the world and norms of that time, would, in fact, would be the first ones to see and know of his resurrection.

Friends, in the midst of the White House being an unchecked hot spot for the COVID-19 virus, as we live in a state where a group of men thought it would be a good idea to kidnap our Governor and storm our state capital, well friends, it has never been a better time to be a people of faith.

Not people who pray with our eyes closed, heads down waiting for miracles to waft our way, but rather grace-filled people who know that our faith, our beliefs are best made real when they are embodied in our actions and our reactions toward those we know and love and even more so toward those whom we do not know and have every doubt about loving. Now is a time for us to viscerally understand that every single person is loved by God and called by God. Which brings me to this pointed, unsettling story told by Jesus to both the people and the religious authorities of the day.

I used to be very ambivalent about this passage but after some more reading and rolling around in it a bit, it has grown on me. I think it may be helpful for me, for you and perhaps for all of us who are swimming in this chaotic, hyperbolic moment in time.

Let's look at the story. Jesus is teaching and preaching in the temple. The people are taking in all he has to say in, all the while conscious that the scribes, priests and religious bureaucrats are standing on the edges listening, taking notes even. This is a case where Jesus isn't talking directly to the bureaucrats but he is talking about them in front of the growing crowds. The people, they know what's going on, they can feel the tension rising. This is the third parable he's told, where the ones in charge are eventually tossed out on their heads. But this one is different, because it doesn't stop there. Let's look deeper.

First, the King invites all of the high-end people to an amazing wedding banquet—this is the “A” list. But everyone on the “A List” seems to have more important things to do. So they blow off the king, come up with lame excuses and fail to accept this amazing invitation. The king gets testy and a bit vindictive. It turns out the King does not suffer fools lightly.

That said, another invite goes out, this time to the “B list”. The rich, the cool, the famous and amazing have blown the king off, but everyone else, those who are mostly pretty aware and free of the illusion that they can make it on their own, this time they are on the list, they get the invitation. I kinda figure I’d be on this list, the “B list”. The invite goes out to absolutely everyone, the normal people, good and bad. And pretty much everyone shows up. Why not, it’s a banquet.

The king is pleased, the man is happy. The hall is finally crowded, the celebration can finally begin.

But then the king walks through the hall and sees someone who has accepted his invitation but failed to dress for the occasion—failed to change. Well, the king asks the man why?—Why didn’t you put on one of the wedding garments? (Here a number of commentators presume that there must have been a stack of wedding garments available to everyone to part on as they entered this amazing gathering.) (Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of Judgment* p 123) The poorly dressed fellow has no answer as to why he is there, completely unchanged by this invitation. So the King orders the fellow to be vanquished to outer darkness.

At first read, and as someone who is not always known for my fashion sense, I’m appalled that this poor guy gets thrown out because he doesn’t have on the right outfit. But the more commentaries I read, the better sense I had of the allegorical meaning. Let’s be clear on more than one occasion my spouse Susan has accused me of being a bit too literal in all things. So let’s let go of a literal interpretation and look at it this way.

What might Jesus be saying?

Everyone gets invited—absolutely everyone gets invited, and all of us are issued an amazing invitation to God’s Kingdom. The only catch—is having been invited—we can’t just show up—in our old garments—as our old selves.

Once invited, once we get that amazing gold embossed invitation in our hands we now know that we are accepted and loved, and being accepted and completely and utterly loved well that’s our invitation to change. To not just be dressed as our old ratty selves, but to let the essence of who we are, made in God’s image and likeness, no longer be dimmed by cloaks of past sins, past self-absorptions, past false-truths we tell ourselves; we are all called to grow and to change. We do not and dare not risk settling for who and how we are now. There is so much more friends, and now now now we need to accept God’s invitation to change.

The invitation comes to all of us as we are. Accepting the invitation requires that we no longer limit our selves to how we have been, but instead to flourish, to change, relinquishing the old, adorning our selves in God's hope and clothing ourselves in God's love.

A banquet, here and now, awaits us.

Amen.