

**19 Pentecost
October 11, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.**

AMEN

Don't we hate to hear such harsh words as we just heard in today's Gospel? I know I much prefer to hear the many sayings of Jesus that are gentle and comforting. So, I am going to try to unpack this so its message for us, hopefully... will be inspiring and useful with all we are dealing with.

But first... I've been thinking...Have you ever had an invitation to something but chose to skip it? And you offered some excuse that you came up with? Only to learn later from others who had accepted the invitation, about all you had missed!? How wonderful the event was, the special things that happened. But ALAS! Too late! For the opportunity had come and gone and you were not a part of it.

Well, today's Gospel is all about an invitation and the people's response to it.

This is another parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. A wedding feast was a familiar image for the Kingdom of Glory promised to the people of God. And Jesus is often referred to as "The Bridegroom" with the Church being the bride. Well now, here in this story, a King gave a feast for his son. When everything was ready, he sent out his messengers to tell the invited guests to come. He is appalled at the response. It is obvious that his invitation is not a priority among the invited people. Again, we encounter the theme of the cavalier way that the invitations of the King are treated. Everyone has an excuse. The King sends out his invitations again... and this time the messengers are killed. The King then has his servants go out into the streets and invite anyone they come across.

Now, for us, the King is our Lord God. The messengers were the prophets of old who had been sent, repeatedly, to call the people to repentance, and to have respect for others, even the lowest members of society. Jesus tried throughout his ministry to have people *hear* God's invitation to the JOY of the Kingdom of Heaven...to the Heavenly Banquet, but he was ignored by many, and then abused, and eventually killed. The prophets of old TRIED to have the people hear their call to prepare themselves, but they had been ignored, or maltreated, or killed. As a result, Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed, once by the Assyrians centuries before, and now, shortly before Matthew's Gospel was written, by the Romans.

But what of the Wedding Banquet? Was God's purpose now frustrated, and his promise void? No. There were others to whom it was offered, others, far beyond the initial intention. Although I would like to skip over it, we can't overlook the mention of the person who was thrown out because he did not have a wedding garment. As is so often the case with stories from the Gospel, the message lies much deeper than the surface. In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is like a royal wedding feast and woe to the person who tries to come unprepared...that

is.... unrepentant, not in a right relationship with God, or with one another. That individual will experience outer darkness rather than the joy of the Eucharistic Feast.

For US, the story is about the countless invitations of God that come into our lives, invitations to seek God, to have God at the center of our lives, to make time and space for God in the midst of our present worries, concerns and discouragement, to resist the very strong elements in our culture, the thoughts and the news that would push God to the margins of our lives, or to eliminate God from our considerations all together. And these invitations come all the time in our daily life, by no means always in religious terms. They often come in the disguise of everyday life, sometimes through another person, sometimes as we share our Spiritual Communion and begin to realize that it really *is* for us, a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet,.... OR sometimes when we are very quiet, OR sometimes through our music. The important thing is to recognize the invitations AND to accept them when they come ... to be joyful that God is continually calling to us.

Those who refuse the invitation to God's banquet usually believe they have very good reasons. For example, God invites us to non-violence. "Those who live by the sword, etc..." But, unfortunately too many believe there is justification for violence. So when violence becomes a way of life... as it has in so many ways, too many deceive themselves by claiming that we have good reason for it, and in the process reject the divine invitation to a better way.///// Or think how we can deceive ourselves into thinking that being unforgiving is OKwhen we *know* God's invitation is to a higher way. When invited to a banquet of sharing, we can justify selfishness. And for some, Even an invitation to relationship... and love... is not inviting at all to those more focused on selfish concerns.

The words of Jesus tell us that We, you and me...WE are invited into a kingdom where God loves us more than we can imagine. And surely that is the most important invitation of all for us to accept. If we can accept that one, the others may more naturally be accepted. But...we have so many secrets. We have so many reasons for believing that WE are not all that lovable that it becomes difficult to see the love dimension in the rest of the folks whom God has made. The bottom line is that we have been invited to see with new eyes. When we can do that, we will see ourselves as God sees us and we will see others as God sees THEM. We will see the possibility for miracles because that is God's way. And when we can see these things, we will not have to be told that we are at the banquet. We will have accepted the invitation and we will know it. People who hear God's word and see his ways, understand the importance of the divine invitation. It does not occur to them to reject it...not for anything. We all are experiencing previously unimaginable challenges right now, BUT we do have our Lord's invitation, and that comes with hope,

As for the wedding garment, that too will be given to us by the same God who invites us.//////// The movie AS GOOD AS IT GETS has a scene that used to be much more common than it is today. Jack Nicholson goes to a restaurant and is told that he cannot be seated without a coat and tie. But, as many restaurants used to do, they offered him a loaner for the evening. Just as the restaurant owner provides what the guest needs in order to fit in, so God provides us with what we need as people invited to the kingdom. The question is "are we ready, individually, as a

nation, as a culture, to accept the invitation that is still being held out to us?" Are we ready to RSVP in the affirmative? Are we ready to clothe ourselves in what God offers us?

If we have accepted the king's invitation to feast with him, then we WILL have the proper attire because we will be CLOTHED IN JOY. One of our beautiful hymns actually sums up the message of today's Gospel very beautifully. It says "Deck thy self, my soul, with gladness. Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness. Come into the daylight's splendor; there, with JOY, thy praises render, unto him whose grace unbounded, hath this wondrous banquet founded." It is a beautiful prayer set to music.

Another expression of living out this joyful response to our Lord's invitation is found in today's Epistle, St. Paul's letter to the early church in Philippi in which he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guide your hearts and your minds. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, Keep on doing these things...and the God of peace *will* be with you."

Dag Hammarskjold, was a 20th Century writer and philosopher, and in the 1950s was elected Secretary General of the United Nations. He wrote: "For all that has been...Thank you. For all that will be...Yes!" In fact, this is Ted and Caren's prayer, their grace at mealtime.

May we also say YES. May we accept God's invitation to live more closely with him, to feast with him and to know the light and joy that comes with that. No More Excuses! Pray that our response, our RSVP to OUR Lord and King will always be a resounding YES.

AMEN