

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

There is a website for preaching that I go to for help most weeks called, “Working Preacher.” And this week, of this passage commentator David Lose says, “Let’s just admit it, this is an ugly parable.” And then, he goes on to recommend that preachers pick a different passage to preach on.

And I have to say that I agree with him - this is not the passage I thought it was far off when I saw the sub-heading, “parable of the Wedding Banquet.” The parable I was remembering was of a king who wants to invite people to a great banquet or dinner, so he sends his servants out to invite all his friends and local dignitaries. But, none of those people want to come - they all have excuses, some are busy, some have fields to plant, others family matters to

attend to. And so when none want to come to his great banquet, the king sends his servants to the forgotten places of the world - to the streets and alleys; to the injured and those who are unable to work enough in order to pay for the daily necessities of life; the servants are sent to the foreigners and prisoners and those with mental illness - all are invited to the banquet - all are invited to the table.

This is the parable I was expecting -



a parable that illustrates the kingdom of God as this beautiful and endless table; this vision of a table where all are truly welcome, where there is always more than enough food; where there is always an extra seat at the table.

This is why I recommended to Worship Committee that we have communion today, what a perfect conclusion to the vision of the kingdom of God that this parable presents - God's endless table of abundance; GOD's endless table of inclusion, for all who are hungry for the good things of God.

But that is not the parable I found as I cracked the pages of Matthew's version of this parable. The parable does start out this way: repeated invitations are carried to the intended guests, who not only refuse to attend but inexplicably abuse the king's messengers and even kill some of them. Responding in kind, the king sends an army to destroy those invited along with their city.

The search for new guests takes the king's servants to the main streets, roads leading away from the city to the world beyond, and attracts a huge but mixed crowd, "both good and bad" guests come to celebrate the wedding, says the parable. This paves the way for the scene with the embarrassed guest who lacks the proper attire and whose dismissal reads like a sentence of final judgment - the guest without the correct wedding robe is not just asked to leave, but thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

An ugly parable, to be sure. A parable that doesn't fully fit with my picture of Jesus, nor my picture of God.

As the opening words of the text indicate, the kingdom in this story is God's kingdom, and the story, say almost all of the scholars I read, this is to be read as a historical allegory. That the king of the story is to represent God, and the slaves that are sent out to invite people to the wedding banquet represent all the prophets and messengers that have brought the message of God - prophets who spoke of God's love for all, of God's desire for peace - who spoke of God's care for the poor, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan; prophets who urged the people to pursue justice and care for the marginalized and rejected. But the kingdom that these prophets

proclaimed in the name of God is a kingdom that the world does not want. And so, as in this allegory, some of the prophets were ignored, some chastised, and others killed.

The allegory does not stop here (here is where our parable turns ugly). In our parable the king, in retribution for the rejection of his messengers, becomes enraged and destroys the city, burning it to the ground.

It would seem, that after all the time it would take to send in soldiers and burn a city to the ground - by that time, you would think the lamb and steak would be quite over cooked by this point and the feast ruined - but apparently not - for after the city has been destroyed, then the king sends his slaves to the streets and the far off places, inviting them to the banquet. This continues until the wedding hall is filled with guests, both good and bad.

This is where we have to depart a bit from the biblical story into history. For the rest of this allegory connects to pieces that happen after the life of Jesus.

The gospel of Matthew is written a generation or two after the death and resurrection of Jesus, most scholars would guess around 40-60 years after Jesus. And, like all of us do when we do most anything, most scholars would also say that the author of Matthew had an agenda or particular point of view as he wrote.

In the year 70 of the Christian Era, there was a Jewish uprising against Rome, Jews in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas tried to overthrow the Roman government and take control of their ancestral homeland once again. This uprising failed, and in response the Roman government expelled all the Jews from Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, burning it to the ground. And so, it is the view of most scholars, that this is the situation that Matthew is referring

to in this parable of Jesus - that when the king in the parable has the city burned to the ground, it is the view of the author of Matthew that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is God's judgment for the rejection of Jesus.

And the slaves going out to the streets to invite everyone in, that anticipates the "Great Commission" when the disciples are told to go into all the world making disciples which comes at the very end of the gospel - it is alluding to mission to us, the Gentiles. This mission which will bring in both faithful and false followers of Jesus.

Finally, the parable concludes with the scene of one who is not wearing the correct clothing, so they are thrown out. This garment that symbolizes the righteousness that true disciples wear, without which one cannot truly inhabit God's kingdom.

And so that is our parable. Dark in many ways. A parable that does not align with my view of God in many ways.

What I have left to say of this parable is that, as we think of the scripture, God's people tell the story. God has allowed us to tell the story of God through the ages; God has chosen to work through us and our flaws to tell God's story, even the story of Jesus. In the mystery and love of God, God (She/He) has let us tell the story.¹

This is easier to say when we are talking about strange Old Testament stories, to say, "well, that is just our human perspective coming out" or "that is just the ancient worldview of the author." But, the same is also sometimes true in the New Testament as well - even in the

¹ The line, "God let's God's children tell the story" comes from episode 74 of *The Bible for Normal People* podcast; hosted by Peter Enns and Jared Byas.

gospels. That sometimes the view or situation of the author overtakes the message of Jesus. Even in the gospels.

The author of Matthew, believe most scholars, lives in this tension between the Jewish and the emerging Christian community - he and his fellow Christians who are a small minority, believe scholars, have felt rejected again and again by their Jewish sisters and brothers. And so this impacts his writing and his view of history.

The author of Matthew, believe most scholars, was a Christian who was first Jewish - he saw Jesus as fully connected to the Jewish story of faith and is seeking to call other Jewish people to consider Jesus. And so this impacts his writing and his view of history; it impacts how he speaks of the Jewish community.

The author of Matthew, believe most scholars, has seen many Gentiles come into the church - accepting that message of God's love has been extended to them, but they have refused to transform their life - they have been satisfied with feeling accepted without wanting to have their lives reflect the love and grace of Jesus. And so this impacts his writing and his view of history.

And, of course, *this is what we do as well* - we try to tell the story of Jesus, but we can't help ourselves, our own thoughts and historical situations distort the message of Jesus Christ - they distort the love story of God. We try to let our lives tell the story of God's love, and sometimes they do, and others times we, of course get in the way.

We try to tell the story of Jesus, but sometimes our Americanness gets in the way -

Our overemphasis on the individual and individual salvation; the way we lift-up the rugged individual and forget our communal salvation and interdependence.

We try to tell the story of Jesus, but for some of us, our maleness gets in the way - we portray God like us; we unknowingly reinforce hierarchies and divisions; we devalue things that are traditionally considered feminine.

We try to tell the story of God's unending love, but our wealth gets in the way. Our comfort gets in the way; we have a desire for God to remake the world, but not too much; for the Holy Spirit to come, but with not too much power, for things to not get upset and reordered too differently, because this version of the world is working out pretty well for us in many ways.

We try to tell the story of Jesus, but for most of us here, our whiteness gets in the way. We fail to hear what others are telling us about their situations and the ways that our systems function to keep them at the margins; we continue to see ourselves as the saviors that others need, rather than people in need of salvation and transformation ourselves.

We try to tell the story of Jesus, but our own brokenness gets in the way - we are people trying to do our best, but we too have been wounded and hurt by others. And so sometimes we struggle to forgive, we struggle to embrace change, we struggle be gracious...sometimes, we just struggle.

We try to tell the story of Jesus, but we are human. And so we will sometimes take the beautiful story of God's endless table - of God's table that always has enough for all to have their fill - the story of God's table that always has room for one more. And we will warp that story to be about judgment, ours, not God's. Because God allows us to tell the story.



And sometimes we warp it.

And at other times - with our lives, with our love - in the mystery and love of God - sometimes we get it right.

Let's continue to form ourselves in the story of this table - the table where there is always enough, always nourishing, always with an open seat - that healing and hope might flow through us, and into the world. Amen.



