

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
15-10-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 32:1-14	The Golden Calf
Psalms 106: 1-6, 20-24	Praise God, Repent for sinning like their Ancestors.
Philippians 4	Exhortations to do Good Thanks for their Gifts and Greetings
Matthew 22: 1-14	Parable of the Wedding Feast

Introduction

What is the banquet that Jesus speaks of in this parable from Matthew's Gospel today?

The banquet or the party, stands for the fullness of life to which God is calling us. It is a call to intimacy with God, and to a deeper and more authentic personal life. But it is also a call to community with others, because it is almost impossible to have a party without others.

The invitation challenges us to abandon our individualism, our isolationism, our exclusivism, our self-sufficiency, and in accepting Jesus, to be willing to share with others, to associate with others, to collaborate and to celebrate with others.

We have been so much infected by an individual, interpretation of the scriptures that many Christians have come to believe that salvation is an entirely individualistic experience, which has nothing to do with the community of faith. However, Paul in Ephesians 5: 25 tells us that; "*Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for her*". Contrary to the individualism that marks our Postmodern Society, Paul tells us that our salvation is something that happens within community! God invites us to party with him in community and to celebrate the fullness of life, and the only ones who find themselves shut out, are those who will not come to the party.

Parable of the Wedding Feast

Let's now look at the specific parts of the parable from Matthew's gospel, where the Wedding Banquet is symbolic of being invited to be a part of God's Kingdom:-

Firstly, there are those who were invited, but who would not come. In the parable these people represent God's chosen people the Israelites. Many of them, and especially the leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were not willing to listen to Jesus, or accept what Jesus had to say about the coming of God's Kingdom among them. They were not interested in coming to the celebration.

Secondly, there were the slaves of the king, who were sent out to invite guests to the banquet. In the parable the slaves represent the prophets who took God's message to the Israelites. And we know that the prophet's who were sent by God, to his Chosen people the Israelites, we invariably badly treated, and ignored.

Thirdly, there were those who were invited after the first rejections. They were given the designation, "The Good and Bad". These people represent everyone. Each and every one of us. All people throughout the world. It includes everyone. It includes you and it includes me. The God who created each and every one of us, yearns to have a relationship with each and every one of us.

Through Jesus we are all invited into a relationship with God. The beginning of that relationship is when we accept what Jesus has done for us, in his life, death and resurrection. Just as the parable talks about accepting an invitation to the Wedding Banquet, we are called to accept Jesus into our lives.

Then finally, we have the poor guy who turns up, but doesn't wear the wedding robe. Although this guy is at the banquet, he has also chosen to reject Jesus, because he is not on board with all that Jesus is all about. The lack of a robe, signifies the lack of wanting to be at the banquet, or the lack of wanting to be a part of the celebration. It seems quite harsh that the guest without the robe is rejected, but I think we need to see that the lack of a wedding robe was a choice made. Wearing the robe is symbolic of joining the banquet. So, to turn up without a robe, was tantamount to a rejection of the banquet itself.

Christianity is about knowing the way to God through Jesus. In this parable, we hear of God's love for all people. But we are also warned that we need to accept the invitation, and we need to accept it wholeheartedly.

And when we do accept the invitation and put on the wedding robes, we can be assured of God's peace, and God's presence in our lives.

What wonderful symbolism to assure us of the invitation God gives to each and every one of us.

Philippians

And what will it be like to be a part of the Wedding Banquet?

In chapter four of Paul's letter to the Philippians that we heard today, we have a foretaste of what the Wedding Banquet, or our Christian Communities should look like.

We hear about rejoicing, gentleness, and taking everything to God in prayer. We are called to keep in our hearts and minds all that is pure, and pleasing, and commendable and excellent. When we accept God's invitation, it is an invitation to what is best for our lives, and what is best for us to live in community with others.

Conclusion

God Loves us. God loves You. God Loves me.
God wants us to come to the party and celebrate.

Will we come? Will we put on the robe? And join in with everyone who has chosen to celebrate at the Wedding Banquet, and know what it is to be in God's presence, and take our place in God's Kingdom forever? Amen.