

Ordinary 28: Putting on the Wedding Armour

Matthew 22:1-14

Make everyone little paper hats. Perhaps do this at the start with any children present, with additional colouring being optional! Have them distributed to every congregational member at the start of the sermon.

The parable of the Wedding Banquet follows on from last week's parable, and again utilises evocative imagery that we can get caught up in. We risk missing the point that Jesus is making. Given recent weddings amongst our own congregation it is easy to imagine what would have happened if invited people were unable to come. More could be invited in, but, if they turn up unsuitably dressed, would they have been welcomed in?

This parable is supposed to be a parallel to the church community. It is a comparison with the Kingdom of Heaven, and as such it should speak into what is happening in our hearts. When advertising the theme though, is 'wedding armour' as I am mixing my church metaphors to make a point.

Normally, the armour of God (or Gospel armour as the hymn puts it) is seen in context of Christian life. The belt of truth which everything hangs off, the breastplate of righteousness is the outermost part of any armour distinguishing who you are on a battlefield. Faith is a shield protects us from all despair. These images from Ephesians talk about aspects of faith using a soldiering metaphor, and yet, as Christian warriors we aren't to go out with bibles, cutting down swathes of people. We are called to conquer through love, service and sacrifice, which we offer in response to

our faith. The use of clothing as a way of understanding our spiritual selves.

Jesus, is making a point that we are so easily able to miss. When you google, or grab your concordance to search through wedding metaphors for the church, pretty much all you get is Revelation proof texts, a smatter of Ephesians and creepily some 2 Corinthians. Never does it seem that today's parable is included. Why? Because the hard-hitting aspect of the parable doesn't lend itself to easy proof texting. We get so caught up in the man who gets bound head and foot and kicked out of the feast that we struggle to understand what is being said. We actually skip the harshness and punishment passages. Jesus also doesn't specifically use the words the church is a wedding banquet. Because it isn't. It may be compared to one, but proof texters will often not see the 'kingdom of heaven' language for what it is, as the understanding of the spiritual nature of the church and life in Holy Spirit.

But back to the parable. We are to take it as a suggestion of life in the church - a spiritual creation of God that we are a part of. Those initially invited in chose not to be a part of the life of the church even though invitations are sent multiple times. Excuses are mixed and varied, but result in a spiritual death for those who actively work against the church – because those who oppose it are opposed to the fruit of the Spirit, and will be conquered in the service and sacrifice and love that we live out. To actively oppose the church is to oppose these things.

But because of the nature of the church, everyone is invited. Every people are welcomed in, and there is room for all, because the initial ones expected to join in have chosen not to. And they come! All is well, with one exception. The king notices the one off the street who doesn't wear a wedding robe. After calling this man out, has him bound up and thrown out into a place of darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It is easy for us to equate this to be a sense of hell, but even considering a physical punishment takes away from what Jesus is saying here. What is the wedding robe that the man is supposed to wear in the church? It is the Holy Spirit. It is the Fruit of the Spirit. It isn't easy though. The man managed to get in the first place. But staying in place isn't something to take for granted. Being in the church and enjoying your relationship with God isn't just an emotional high at some point in your life, and living off it like a lottery win. Because the church isn't a static building, nor is it a singular party; it is a group of people in relationship with God with and through and alongside each other. Just like the small paper hats on your heads that many of you have taken off, being part of the kingdom of heaven, being in relationship with a God who loves you, takes patience and practice. Not all will master it. Many are called. Few are chosen.

Matthew 22:1-14 (NRSV from bible.oremus.org)

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet 22:1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2The 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, maltreated 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.’

Ephesians 6:10-18

The Whole Armour of God 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.