

Get your gear on?

This parable is not about
what you wear.
It is about the party.
And in whom you trust as
you party at the party!



Matthew 22:1-14

Pre Message: Wedding banquets. They have no doubt been a little bit bizarre this year. Have you ever been to a strange wedding feast? Spend a couple of minutes talking to the person next to you about that experience.

As you came in this morning, you will have received a ribbon and safety pin. What did you do with it?

For those of you who pinned it on your collar, on your shoulder, somewhere on your body – you're welcome to stay. Good things are coming to you!

For those of you who did not wear it, maybe you put it in your handbag, hid it, put it on the seat next to you, put it in the bin, were concerned that it clashed with what you were wearing – you miss out on the treat!

What's that all about? Well, the gospel reading for today is a bizarre little story about being invited to a wedding. You heard it before, let me lead you through it again.

It begins with Jesus saying "the Kingdom of Heaven is like". Whenever Jesus says that, he is doing a contrast and compare type thing. Here, he is contrasting the kingdom of heaven, God's heart, God's purpose, with the attitudes and

perspectives of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The context is important, because immediately prior to this, in Matthew 21, Jesus tells the parables of the two sons and the wicked tenants.

And note that this is not a Christian verses Jew sort of thing. No, Jesus is talking to a solely Jewish audience. He is drawing attention to the fact that even among the Jewish nation themselves, they are divided on the heart and purpose of God!

So, to the parable.

A king holds a banquet to honour the marriage of his son and daughter in law. He sends out the invitations – and oddly, but not totally troubling, people turn down the royal summons.

So he sweetens the deal. He sends a second invitation – this time describing the amount of effort that is being put in to the party, the elaborate preparations. But those who receive the invitation are still not impressed. They make light of the invitation. Some ignore it. Others keep doing their own thing.

Again, odd behaviour. But Jesus' parables are always filled with the unexpected.

And then things go completely off the rails. We watch in horror as the king's servants who have been sent to announce the party are seized, abused and murdered. And like a volcano the king explodes, goes to war against his own people, murders the murderers and turns the city (presumably the king's own city) into a pile of smouldering ashes!

Did you see that coming? Imagine if that was the response if you ever turned down an invitation to a wedding.

But don't think it stops there! It's about to get even more bizarre!

Remember, the banquet has been prepared. The decorations are up. The meat is on the grill. The prawns are on the BBQ. The merriment has been chilled and poured. And the groom and his bride are waiting... but no one is there to celebrate.

So, while the king's own city is burning, he sends out more servants.

***“Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.”
(Matthew 22:9–10, ESV)***

Note. All whom they found. Both bad and good.

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Note that. The king offers no distinction to those who are invited. He invites both bad and good.

To the successful and the unsuccessful. To accomplished and the unaccomplished. To those who have lived an amazingly moral and honourable life and to those whose morality has been so loose that they are filled shame and guilt. To the Mother Theresa’s and the Donald Trumps. All are invited.

To the Jewish hearers of the day, this invitation to commoners, to those who are both bad and good, would have stood out in stark surprise! It would have almost been blasphemous, if that was possible. It would have certainly been offensive.

The party is in full swing. People are having the time of their lives. Food. Wine. Song. The likes of which many of those who were now at the party would have never experienced. Like a child in a candy store, their eyes would have been filled with sheer delight!

And then the king enters the party. He moves among his guests – and notices that one is not wearing a wedding garment.

Just think about that for a moment. Half an hour ago, or an hour ago, these bad and good people were but strangers on a street, doing what they do. If you have been to a party, you know that it takes time to get appropriately dressed!

So what is going on here?

One thing that you need to know, in Jesus time, is that if a king threw a party, the king would have also provided the wedding garment. It was like the entry pass. A blue ribbon. And so this person not wearing a wedding garment, it’s not

because he didn't have one... it's because he chose to do things his way! Perhaps he was a bit proud (the garment didn't match the other clothes that he wore), or a bit up himself (he had his own pretty nice threads), whatever the reason, the king's response seems pretty harsh...

“Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 22:12–13, ESV)

The king calls him a friend, a companion, a comrade.

And the man is speechless. He doesn't know how to respond. I don't like your ribbon? I'm doing well enough thanks.

The king's response is equally surprising. Throw him out! Where is the grace, the kindness, the understanding? From our viewpoint this part of the text seems to leave more questions than answers. With friends like that who needs enemies, yes?

But that is not what the point of this parable is about.

This parable is not about what you wear. It is about the party. And in whom you trust as you party at the party!

You see, in Jesus, and in being clothed with the wedding garment of Jesus through baptism, God has already done everything to include you in the party. It's not about you. It's about the king.

There is nothing that you could do that could make him love you more. And there is nothing that you have done, or could do, that would stop God from loving you.

Our choice, if you want to call it that, is how we choose to live, now that we know that we are at the party.

Will we keep thinking that we need to try harder – or will we trust in what God has done?

Will we party, because we are at the party – or will we look with disdain at those who are a bit different, who don't party like we do?

And will we invite others to the party – will we live and share the grace of God so that all people can experience God’s transforming love and peace?

You’re at the party. Through baptism you’ve got your gear on. Your wedding clothes are perfect. In every way. Fully rely on God, and love, live and party!