

15.10.2017
By Kyle Vandenbroucke – Corrymeela Volunteer

Introduction

This text is in the middle of Jesus' showdown with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The leading question in everyone's mind is who is Jesus. Specifically, for the religious leaders the question is about where Jesus gets the authority to flip tables in the temple (21:12-17), Curse fig trees (21:18-22), and give the teachings he does. Jesus does not care much to answer these questions. He is confident in his identity as God's "beloved" (Matt.3:17). Not only does he flip tables in the temple, Jesus flips the tables on the religious leaders; refusing to answer their questions and rigorously questioning them. Further, he accuses them in the two parables prior to this one of not producing the fruit of the kingdom (Matt. 21:43) and refusing to obey God (Matt. 21:28-32).

Text

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying:

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

Again 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.'

But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business

while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'

Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe,

and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless.

Then 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.'

For many are called, but few are chosen."

Comment

As humans we have a tendency to cling to our own. We stick to the groups we identify with, those who are similar to us. And this is understandable to some degree, because it is what we know – we like familiarity and unfamiliarity can easily make us uncomfortable. A connection is made much more easily with others that share similarities in interests, upbringing, social class, economic class, etc. As many of us know, it can be exceedingly difficult to have a conversation with someone with whom we have nothing in common. We can awkwardly cling to general small talk about the weather, local and global news, and common human dealings as we struggle through necessary meetings with others dissimilar to ourselves. It is easy to draw lines – in fact it often feels as if they draw themselves by the obvious difference of each subgroup.

We initially see two groups being identified at the beginning of this parable: the ones who are invited, and the ones who are not. Towards the middle we see that the ones who were invited actually turn out to be unworthy of the invitation in the first place. Why? Because their response says to the king that there are more important things to do than to celebrate a wedding with him. They are busy with personal affairs such as work, property management, and even war mongering. Moreover some do not just ignore the invitation, they responded aggressively towards the servants and thus towards the king himself.

When those that were invited would not come, the king demonstrates a radical hospitality – inviting those 'on the street' and thus in effect filling his home with strangers to participate in the wedding feast! The ones who were invited prior were those who were wealthy, having estates and affairs to attend to. Those on the street

would probably not be those that out attending to their own business in town but those living on the streets because they had no home. In the parallel story in Luke 14:15–24, the one inviting the guests says, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ Finally the house is filled and the feast is alive.

It is important to note that the good and the bad were invited in. All are welcome to this place, despite their moral standing, despite their societal standing, and despite their disabilities. All of the things that separate these outcasts from society. In this parable Jesus is talking to the religious leaders, and we must remember that Jesus has a reputation of eating with sinners while the religious leaders stand back and judge him for it. If the story stopped here, it could easily be seen as a text supporting an ‘us vs. them’ understanding of the disparity between the upper and lower class, painting the upper class as evil and unworthy and the lower class worthy of the kingdom and superior to the upper class. It could also be interpreted as condemning the religious leaders in the place of the first invited guests, and raising up the sinners who answer the call to the wedding feast as completely worthy. But the story continues.

The king, in finding a guest without a wedding robe, deems him unworthy to be there and sends him away. At first glance this text feels unwelcoming and unmerciful, but a leading question for this part of the parable is ‘why is there only one guest who doesn’t have the wedding robe on?’ Was it within the power of everyone else to acquire a wedding robe, yet it was not within this one person’s power? How did the other guests receive their clothing? Was it given to them by the king upon entrance? Was it purchased earlier? Was it an item they already owned? If they are as Luke’s gospel describes, it could be a reasonable speculation that they would not have owned a suitable garment but had been given it upon arrival. What then was this man’s intentions, and why would he decide not to participate fully in the feast? The answers to any of these questions are not given to us. It seems that these questions are unimportant to this part of the parable. A clear point, here, is that within this second group which has been invited and who attend, there are still some who do not wish to participate. It breaks up this identity of ‘us, the worthy’ and ‘you, the unworthy’. Now, even within the group that has been invited, there are some that are unworthy.

Response

The king in this story does not seek out the kind of direct reconciliation that we may think of with the first guests that are invited. He doesn’t try to seek peace with them. He doesn’t seem to be interested in continuing to invite them after they deal violently towards his servants. Instead, he directs his energy towards those who might respond positively towards his invitation. The first group closes the door to him, and he looks for someone who will leave the door open and step through. The response to this passage is about directing our energy towards those that will give us the opportunity to be hospitable. Invite someone you wouldn’t normally spend time with, or someone who is from a different community that you don’t identify with for tea or a meal. If the first one declines, search for someone who will. Can you take interest in their world, their interests, their lives, even if it is not something you have in common? Can you share the difficulties and imperfections within your own community with them?

Prayer

Oh King of kings, who makes the rain fall on the good and the evil,

and graciously invites all to your table;

we ask that you give us eyes to see your profound love for the other

so that we may be eager to invite all who are willing, to come to our table.

In the name of Jesus, your servant who has broken the dividing wall of hostility,

Amen.