

Pentecost 23 – Wesley 9am & 10.30am – 9th October 2011

Theme: “The Parable of the Wedding Feast” – Matthew 22: 1-14

Text: - Matthew 22: 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Introduction

There is a wonderful story about a fellow clergyman that goes like this:

“One Sunday I began my sermon by saying, ‘If your life is just fine, if your kids and grandchildren are loving and obedient (if you have any), if you have no addictive behaviour, if you feel totally at ease with yourself and everything in life is fulfilling, you can leave now. Please leave quietly so as not to bother those remaining.’ I went on to say that my sermon was addressed to people in need, those whose lives were not all that great at the moment. Oddly no one left when invited to. When I got home the phone was ringing and the voice on the other end said, ‘I couldn’t believe that all those people just sat there when you invited them to leave before your sermon. I wanted to stand up and say: ‘Why are you still here – your life seems pretty good compared to mine.’ Then I realised that as a community of faith we all have areas where we need forgiveness, healing and wholeness. The beauty of the church is that we are all called to be part of God’s wedding feast and we are the ones that have responded.’”

I’m not sure that I’m game enough to offer you the ‘opt out’ of my sermon as you all might leave, but this story makes a great point – we are all here as a faith response to God’s call, through Christ, for one reason or another. We are all here with aspects of our own lives and/or of those close to us, that maybe are not all that we would like them to be. We all have our faith journeying stories and we are still on that life journey.

For me, it has been a difficult week with the death of my sister, Judy, in New Zealand. In a sense, I am pleased that I can lead worship here at Wesley today sharing with and in, my own faith community before flying out to NZ to share in my sister’s thanksgiving service. This is part of the joy to being in a loving, Christian community which in essence is part of today’s parable from Jesus. Let us look at today’s Gospel.

Reflection on Matthew 22:1-14

Note from the outset that Matthew's rendition of the 'Wedding Banquet' has two distinct parts to it and in a sense two separate parables. 1. Verses 1-10 deals with the parable of the invitations to

the actual feast and has strong links with the story found also in Luke 14:16-24. All are initially invited to the feast.

2. The second section in verses 11 - 14 deals with the response of the king to the man not wearing appropriate wedding clothes. He is thrown out which on initial reading seems harsh. We'll come back to this!

The first section of the parable is set against the rejection of Jesus by the religious power brokers in Jerusalem. Hence the initial ones who decline to come to the wedding party are in fact the Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious rulers of the Jews. They rejected the generous offer of God through his son, Jesus. Some argued, some made excuses, others stood aloof or openly spurned the invitation. If they did not welcome Jesus, then the invitation would be widened to the 'common mob' so to speak. There was a place for them at God's table. It reminds us of Jesus' words: 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' So in this parable the banquet hall is crowded with the 'great unwashed', Jew and Gentile, slave and freeperson, male and female, clean and unclean from a Jewish perspective. Here Matthew is loyal to Jesus in telling this story about the inclusiveness of God's love. He gladly affirms the message of inclusiveness, while at the same time he laments the refusal of many of the Pharisees and Priests to be included in this Jesus party. Matthew definitely stands for an open community of faith, an open church.

But what about the second section of the parable. How do we explain this? Well, if we have accepted the invitation of Christ to join him at his feast, then a change in both our attitudes and our actions are expected. A new life style must follow. The 'not wearing of wedding clothes' has been interpreted in various ways. Some literalists suggest that even a poor person would wash their clothes before going to a wedding as a sign of respect and we may say 'couthness' because of the community occasion. Other interpretations of this suggest that the king saw 'no change' of habit or ways of the individual in accepting the invitation, hence the king having the man removed.

The summary verse of the passage is verse 14: “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Possibly this can be read as: “All are invited to be part of God’s kingdom but only a few are chosen by God.” This does not mean that God chooses arbitrarily. Rather the invitation must be accepted and then followed by appropriate conduct. A changed heart, a changed life, an acceptance of forgiveness is all part of our Christian life.

Teaching for us today

1. As a faith community we are called to be an inclusive and welcoming group of God’s people. Any person, of any race, class or tongue is welcome. Church is not simply a club for ‘decent’ people, or smart folk or well educated middle class citizens. It is a place where all are welcomed no matter what their background. It is not based on our standards but on the love of God. In a sense we are the servants in the parable called to: “Go out in to the streets, and as many people as you find there, invite them to the wedding feast.”

Suddenly this parable becomes a little demanding to our little faith communities that have insulated themselves, to some extent from the world, to get out there and invite people from where they are in their own lives into a relationship with Christ.

2. The second part of the parable tells us to expect changed lives in those who accept the invitation. It is one thing to be part of a faith community but quite another thing to allow your faith to positively influence all areas of your life so that people notice that faith change.

If we are claiming to know the love of God through the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, but there is no change in our values, actions and spirituality then something phoney is going on.

Conclusion

Certainly this parable of Jesus, which really appears to be two parables in one, has demands on all of us in our faith journeying.

It reminds us that all are called, all have needs for forgiveness and all need to live in newness of life as God’s forgiven and forgiving people.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give thanks for your gracious invitation. You have come to us and invited us to join the grand celebration of your victorious reign. Give us the grace to accept your invitation gratefully and, in accepting your invitation, to live in the light of your love for us. Amen