



Twenty-eighth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Isaiah 25: 6-10 Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20 Matthew 22: 1-14

Today we have a wedding story.

The reign/vision of God is like a royal wedding banquet. The audience is the same group who listened to the farming stories, the priests and Pharisees.

Food plays an important part in our lives: it not only nourishes the body it also nourishes the spirit. I was told that soldiers in a prisoner-of-war camp would swap stories of favourite recipes. This was in the midst of meagre rations eaten in uncertainty. We might have thought it better to avoid the topic of past meals, but no, the memory of pork bones, pavlova, Christmas cake and cold beer evoked family and friends and so enabled the soldiers to survive the hardships they were enduring.

Isaiah reminds his people of God's merciful love, "Here at God's place he will make a banquet for us." There will be the best food and plenty of prize winning wines. God will heal us, "with his own hanky will he wipe our eyes."

God is present where all people can sit down together, putting aside differences. Imagine the best gathering you've ever been to: God's vision is that life should be lived in the same fellowship, not once a year but always.

With this in mind we turn to Matthew's story of the wedding. The king sends out a lot of personal invitations to the people who usually get invited to such occasions. His invitations were hand delivered, a mark of great honour.

The invited paid no attention to the invitation. We couldn't imagine such a thing happening. We know that sometimes people refuse invitations as a protest or to indicate their feelings, but usually they want it to be noted that they are boycotting the occasion. Rarely do you hear of people ignoring a royal invitation.

When it got back to the king that his invitation had been met with, not only rudeness, but violence towards his messengers he re-acted with violence against the murderers and against their cities.

The king had already prepared his feast so he sent his servants out to invite anyone they ran into. As the king mingled with his new guests he found a guest who had not accepted the garment that went with the invitation. When asked, why not. The person didn't even bother to reply. The king's response was swift. "Put him out into the dark."

The original hearers of this story would not have been in any doubt about the subject of this story. God's kingdom is not for the complacent, those who feel they belong by birth or piety. The invitation to discipleship is open to all.

The same is true today. It is not enough to belong to a parish, join a group or even contribute to planned giving, to be a disciple is to work diligently to bring about the kingdom, “on earth as it is in heaven”.

Jesus said that prostitutes and sinners would be welcomed ahead of the self-righteous.

The symbol of the meal, from banquet to beans on toast, to Eucharist, is a reminder of the great mission that is entrusted to us as disciples.

As the land belongs to God and we are the stewards, so too, all food belongs to God. We are called to take to heart the words of Jesus. “You feed them.”

All people can expect the mercy of God, the compassion of God, the forgiveness of God when they encounter a friend of God.

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