

10/11/26
20th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from October 4th – October 10th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Lord of the feast, you have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out your life with abundance. Call us again to your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 21:33-46) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 22:1-14

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Why does the king send servants to announce the banquet more than once?
2. Why does the king respond so violently to those who reject the invitation?
3. Why does the guest have nothing to say when questioned?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When have you experienced being invited somewhere when you expected to be left out?
2. Have you ever resisted something that, in retrospect, you believe God was inviting you to do?
3. When have you had difficulty with generosity?

Memorize this verse: "Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." (Matthew 22:9) What is the difference between being invited somewhere and actually feeling welcome?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 23. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

We've had a stretch of some, let's say, difficult parables. But this one might take the cake. This parable seems just plain nasty. Not so much because it's difficult to interpret, but rather because of the indiscriminate violence in the passage. So what are we to make of it? Well, let's start with some history. Matthew is writing his Gospel, to a fledgling community of early believers, largely Jewish, who are caught up in a fierce sibling rivalry with their former community members even as they are trying to fit into the new reality of Roman domination. The temple has been destroyed. Jerusalem has been devastated. The Jewish community is trying to figure out what comes next, and Matthew's community is trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of all of that. It's in this context that Matthew describes Jesus as telling a string of parables that depict God's rejection of those who have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, even going so far as to describe the destruction of the Temple as God's righteous judgment.

From this point of view, the original guests can be understood as the Jewish religious authorities who have rejected Jesus. The king's destruction of the city can be heard against the backdrop of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. And the invitation of "all" points toward the spread of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in this new community. There is a lot that speaks in favor of this reading. It aligns with so much else that is going on in Matthew's Gospel and it corresponds to what we know about the conflict and upheaval surrounding Matthew's community. The problem is this reading also leaves us with a deeply troubling picture of God. A God who is vindictive and violent. A God who is so offended by a lack of attendance at a banquet that he destroys cities and murders people. A God who invites someone to a wedding feast and then throws them into the outer darkness because they aren't wearing the right clothes. Yikes. This doesn't feel like a picture of God we can live with. Now there are certainly other approaches to this text (thank you, Jesus!) including focusing on the gracious invitations of the king. First, there are multiple appeals to the original guests. Then, when they refuse, the invitation goes out to everyone. The banquet is filled with people who never expected to be there. Even the rejection of the guest without a wedding garment has sometimes been interpreted through the language of grace. We enter the kingdom because of what God gives us, not because of what we have earned ourselves.

And while interpretations like these help alleviate some of our discomfort, I wonder if there is another way. One that doesn't require us to play fast and loose with the actual details of the parable. Can we both sympathize with the historical and theological circumstances that shaped Matthew's retelling of this story while also recognizing that Matthew's vision of God, like every human vision of God, is limited? To put it another way, can we imagine that Matthew got so much right. And still got some things wrong? I'm already thinking about Advent, Christmas, and Matthew's repeated use of Isaiah's promise that in Emmanuel, "God is with us". But God being "with us" does not need to imply that God is not with others, let alone against others. And the moment we lament Matthew's limited vision, we need to turn the same lens on ourselves. Because, how often do we limit our imagination about who God will find acceptable? At how many points in our lives have we employed our theology, community practices, or even worship life to exclude others? How often have we been resistant to the possibility that God loves people we do not love and even that God loves them as much as God loves us? Limited vision, I'm afraid, is part and parcel of being human. We see what we are able to see. We understand God through the experiences we have had, the communities we belong to, the people we trust, and sometimes the people we fear. And sometimes our limited vision of God causes us to limit the people we believe God could possibly love. That is part of what Christ comes to reveal and redeem. And yet Jesus comes for all. For those we reject and for those we who are guilty of rejecting. The invitation is still being made, but less by a fickle and violent king and more by a loving and persistent parent who will come bearing the twin and nearly simultaneous truths that we are woefully fallen, and at the same time completely accepted and beloved, children of God.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen