

Invited to the Wedding
20 Pentecost; October 11, 2026
Saint John's Episcopal Church
Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matt 22:1-14

This morning's parable is another fierce one. It continues the hostile exchange between Jesus and the religious leadership of Jerusalem that we've been tracking for the last few weeks, and which we'll continue to follow through the end of this month.

Once again, we hear Jesus pronouncing harsh words of judgment. And once again, Jesus' words are not subtle. The king in our parable is God. The wedding banquet for God's son is a standard image for eternal life. The invited guests are the religious leaders Jesus is addressing throughout this section. By refusing to listen to Jesus, they are refusing God's invitation to eternal life, so they will experience God's wrath.

The king's messengers then go out into the streets and gather everyone they can find, filling the wedding hall. But even those in the second round of guests are subject to judgment. Most of them presumably enjoy the party, but the one without a wedding robe shares the fate of the first set of guests.

Whenever we read or hear a parable, our question should be, what is Christ saying to me, to us? But this one feels unusually personal to me.

As it happens, this weekend, Carrie and I attended a wedding banquet. The festivities began Thursday evening. We showed up on Friday in time for a Unitarian service. On Saturday, the couple got married a second time, in a Hindu service. For that one, guests were encouraged to wear Indian clothes—saris for women and kurtas for men.

I am not part of the inner circle for this couple. I had never met the bride. The groom is a cousin of Carrie's who has lived in Michigan for the entire time I've been part of the family. I've only seen him a few times over the course of three decades. I doubt he could have picked me out of a crowd.

In the terms of our parable, I would definitely be in the second round of guests, not the first. So far, so good. I dodged the first bullet, so to speak.

But, since I don't own a kurta, I was not wearing the proper wedding robe yesterday. According to Jesus, I deserved to be bound hand and foot and thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! Thankfully Carrie's cousin was prepared to let my fashion faux pas go!

As I said last Sunday, I struggle with parables of judgment. But parables of judgment can be a helpful reminder, particularly if we start falling into the trap of thinking of ourselves as God's favorites, as if we are due the best seats at God's party.

We are included among God's people, which is really good news. But we are included as an act of grace and love on God's part. We are included not because God has to include us, but because God invites us in. We need God's help just to accept God's invitation to the great wedding party in the sky. And we should respond with gratitude and love, not a sense of entitlement or superiority. I think gratitude and love is what Jesus means by us wearing a wedding robe.

But there is less ominous good news here, too. I love the image of the kingdom of heaven as a wedding banquet.

I grew up watching cartoons with angels wearing white robes, sitting on clouds, and playing harps. To people more musical than I, that might sound good. To me, that sounds like a horrible combination of stressful and boring.

I'm not really a party man either, but to me a wedding banquet is a much more attractive image of the kingdom of heaven. Weddings are happy, and weddings are fun.

I think again about the wedding Carrie and I attended this weekend. It was fun. It was a reunion for Carrie's extended family, bringing together people who hadn't all been together, to the best of my knowledge, in years. For me, that included several family members I had never met.

That's a good way to think about the kingdom of heaven—as a reunion with people we can't otherwise see, people who have gone before us and people who will come after us.

And, weddings are more than a reunion. Weddings create something new. Like every wedding, the one Carrie and I attended this weekend created a more sacramental union for the couple themselves. And it united two previously unrelated families into one bigger extended family.

The Kingdom of Heaven will be like that, too.

Despite the judgment on the surface of our parable, our parable is remarkably inclusive. When the king's servants go out the second time, Jesus tells us they gather "all whom they found, both good and bad." That word "all" is encouraging! But what most strikes me is the inclusion of the bad along with the good.

The second round of guests are the people Jesus ministered to, which was just about everybody. Jesus ate with the holy people. Most of Jesus' ministry was to the ordinary people, people like the fishermen Peter and Andrew, James and John. And Jesus was quite clear that he came for the people who needed him most, the sinners and prostitutes and tax collectors. Jesus welcomed everybody. They're all invited to the banquet.

Best of all, that includes us, who are sometimes saintly, and sometimes sinners, and mostly ordinary, and always in need of God's grace.

Like our weddings, the kingdom of heaven will bring us together with people we may not have previously thought about as family, and probably some people we will be surprised, even perhaps a little uncomfortable, thinking about as family.

It may turn out that there are some party crashers in the group. But even if that happens, we need to remember that we are not God's bouncers. God can handle that if God feels a need to. Our task is to love everybody at the banquet, and to rejoice in the presence of everybody at the banquet.

It's exciting to think of ourselves as invited guests at a wedding banquet in the kingdom of heaven. But we can go farther. Christ, the son of the king, is the bridegroom at the wedding banquet. And we, the Church, God's people, are the bride.

That is an amazing thing to think about. I wouldn't have the nerve to say it if the Apostle Paul hadn't said it first in his letters (see, e.g. 2 Corinthians 11:2).

We are the ones everyone stands up to see as we process in. We are the ones who look beautiful, not with our own beauty but because we are created in God's image and likeness and restored by Christ to our intended glory.

As we sit with that image, the kingdom of heaven as a grand wedding banquet with a remarkable range of guests including us, maybe even in the role of bride, Paul's final words in our passage from Philippians make sense.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” To which I say, Amen!