

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 14:15-24 (NT page 1048)

Background to the reading

Our reading this morning reflects a typical scenario in Biblical times of honour and shame.

It was extremely important for anyone who had honour to invite others who had the same or even more honour. You would not dare to invite anyone who was "shameful" in the eyes of society because then you too were regarded as "shameful". And because you invited distinguished guests, it was likely impossible for them to refuse your invitation.

But in our parable the invited guests did not turn up. In fact according to the culture of those times, they would have already indicated that they will be coming. So by not turning up they insulted the host in a big way.

So when the host send out his servant, they made all sorts of lame excuses. It seems clear from their excuses that they were indeed rich and well to do. To own land and having 5 oxen, were only possible for people who had money. And they would have had servants who could perform the tasks on behalf of them.

The last excuse was one that could work in times of war. We read in the Old Testament that when a man got married he was exempt from going to war for at least a year. But he would not have been excused from attending social functions.

And when the servant reported back to his master, his master were furious.

But then the host did something that was unheard of in Biblical times – he invited the poor, crippled, blind and lame from the streets and alleys of his town. He even invited those outside the city gates. These people would never have been to a fancy banquet before, because of their social status, and by inviting them the host committed social suicide, but he just thought that he has gone through all this trouble to prepare a special feast, so a special feast he will have. If the people he invited didn't want to join him, he'll get others. Anybody *willing to attend* his banquet would be welcome there.

And those who were invited and didn't want to go – well... They weren't welcome anymore.

The meaning of this parable is clear.

The kingdom of God was very often portrayed as a banquet, feast or meal of some kind in those days, because meals were seen as ceremonies during which people's social status were confirmed.

So – God invited people to be a part of his kingdom, but the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time declined, without good

reason. They were too busy with their own lives and the things they regarded as important in their own eyes. But things that, in the bigger scheme of things, weren't that important at all.

But when they declined God opened up his kingdom to all – no matter who they were. Something so gracious and big that it would have made people do a double take when they realised what it meant.

Amen

Sermon

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

Actually literally in the Greek text it says Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Bread was the staple food of the Mediterranean world and it was considered the only thing you need to survive starvation. So the man sitting with Jesus actually was saying a profound thing. He actually meant that all we need will be provided for in God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God will be a banquet where everyone who has faith is invited to. In fact – every time we proclaim our faith in the Lord

Jesus, we RSVP so to speak - to attend the feast God is preparing for all of us.

And we do not need fancy invitation cards or parking cards to be allowed into His kingdom. All we need is faith. We do not have to have fancy titles, or fancy clothes or important jobs or money. In our parable Jesus makes it very clear that the kingdom of God is for everyone who is willing to come to Him in faith.

I could not help think about this parable in the week, especially after attending the Queen's annual garden party at Holyrood House.

Ever since I can remember, I have been fascinated by royalty from all over the world. And when this invitation fell through our letterbox, I was overcome with joy! I was so excited! As you all know I am at my happiest when I can enjoy a cuppa with special friends, especially if the tea is served in fine china!!

I counted the sleeps. But of course, because the queen was going to be there, strict protocol was followed. Women had to wear a day dress and hat, and men a morning coat or uniform. We read and reread the invitation and made sure that we knew exactly when to be where and what to do once we get there.

So driving into Edinburgh, I remarked that the people in the car behind us were going to the Garden Party too. Nanda said: How do you know that. I replied that they were smartly dressed, but also had

the parking permit in their window. At which point I realised that we forgot our own parking permit at the house. And by this time we could not drive back to East Calder especially if we wanted to arrive in time. I said to Nanda I am sure the police will understand if we show them our invitation card. After reading in the news paper that there was about 8000 people who attended the Garden Party, I'm sure you can imagine what the traffic was like. And then when, we were walking distance from the Palace, a policeman stopped us and asked for the permit. No entry then. Not even my collar could convince him to let us in... (Which Nanda suspected was going to happen.) So we had to turn around and find a parking space somewhere in the heavily congested city centre and then walk to the palace! So we had quite a distance to walk – Nanda in high heels, hat in hand on cobblestones, in the warm rays of the sun?! A very good start to a lovely afternoon... But we decided to just make the best of our situation and enjoy the day.

And what a beautiful day it was! The sun was shining all day long, the tea, the cucumber sandwiches, the dainty cakes and the ice cream were nicer than we expected and to see the queen was just amazing.

And every single person there was dressed correctly, behaved properly and felt privileged for the opportunity to be there.

I don't think that anybody who were able to attend would refuse such an invitation, and nobody would even consider not to follow the

protocol – because that's just what you do if the Queen (or Lord Chamberlain on her behalf) invites you over.

To this very day God still invites us to him. He gives us so many opportunities to come to Him and live in a relationship with him. In Jesus he gave us an open invitation to become members of his family. And everyone is invited – not only 8000 but millions and trillions of people.

Keeping the parable in mind, we should accept His invitation straight away without any hesitation – because no matter how important the things we are busy with feels, nothing is more important than saying yes to God.

And if we can prepare ourselves to be immaculate in dress and decorum for the queen how much more must we prepare ourselves for God. Yes God accepts us as we are but surely because He is the Almighty God, we will want to be at our best before Him.

And yes all of us have heard His voice calling us this morning. But he also calls us out of the church, out of the safety of this building to go into the streets and invite others to come to Him too. And the only way we would be able to convince others is through our commitment - our way of living our faith, and through living the loving forgiveness of our Lord and Saviour.

You and I are the servant in the Parable. We need to extend God's loving invite to everyone around us. You and I need to be the hands and feet of Jesus in everyday life.

And we need to go outside our comfort zones, outside the safety of our faith community and live God's love. Because God's love will be able to break down barriers and open gates, when we go in faith, hope and love.

Nanda's hat was a sure sign to everybody who saw her on Tuesday afternoon that we were attending the Queen's Garden Party. Just like that our lives, everything we say and do, should be a sign to the people around us that we accepted the invitation from God. At all times, we should be "wearing" our Christianity with pride.

All God wants from us is a yes, thank you and a life of faith. And if we mean this "yes", it will show.

May you and I never be ashamed of our faith and may you and I always proclaim His Gospel of love, mercy and forgiveness everywhere we go to all people. May we desperately do our best to reach the vulnerable, those who are lost and full of burdens..those whose eyes are hollow....

Amen