



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading Matthew 22:1-14.

Sermon: 26 July 2009

The text for the sermon Matthew 22 verse 14:

"For many are invited, but few are chosen."

This text in Matthew does not make sense at all to us living in the 21st century. To us it is unthinkable to go and kill the people that you previously invited just because they refused to come to your son's wedding reception.

But this passage was written in a different context in a different time with different values. This passage urges us to put on glasses of the Mediterranean culture to understand it in context.

This passage is all about honour and shame – something that I explained in a sermon two weeks ago. Jesus is actually saying the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a wedding feast where the guests did not respond accordingly!

The king who had honour invited guests that had the same honour as he had. Usually a double invitation went out presumably to other cities as well. This practise allowed potential guests to find out whom else was coming and whether everything had been arranged properly. This was important to the guests because their honour was on the line. If you mingled with the wrong crowd meaning with people who had less honour than you – you lost your own honour and could fall into shame.

So in this story the guests refuse to come. Even at the second invitation they refused. They even mistreated the slaves and killed them for just bringing them the invitations! This was a clear traditional way of telling the host – in this case the king- that they the elite guests disapproved of either the dinner arrangements or the people on the guest list. By killing the king's servants was a direct insult to the king's honour.

Then only way the king could restore his honour was doing an honourable thing like ratifying the deaths of his slaves. He sends his soldiers to destroy the murderers and their cities.

Then the story takes a surprising turn. The king send out his slaves to the streets, literally the crossroads, the city squares, the streets near the city walls, the places where the non-elite, the shameful would hang about.

The king acts totally without any honour. He is crossing the social boundaries!

And then again the story surprises us when the king came in to see the guests. One guest was not wearing a proper wedding robe. The king acts very harshly. He literally kicks out the poor wee soul because he is not properly dressed. But again this is not what really happened. In those days the honourable thing to do by the elite was to occasionally shower their slaves or the non-elite with their smart garments.

And this was exactly what the king most probably did. He would have provided the non-elite with proper clothes. The one guest decided not to wear the garments provided by the king and thus shaming the honour of the king. The king restores his honour once again by treating the person in a very shameful way. So in context it means that the king was insulted by the invited guests and acted accordingly. But he is also very generous by crossing social boundaries by willingly mingling with the outcasts!

What does it mean for us today then?

Jesus wanted to tell his listeners that the Jewish leaders rejected him. He then went into the streets to invite everyone that is willing in faith to participate in the heavenly feast. But behold the Christian that does not act like the invitee of the lord's feast that is not dressed for the occasion. We must never forget that it is great responsibility and honour to be part of God's family. We must therefore wear the right clothes, or in other words live a life that suits a member of God's family.

I think the symbol of clothing says a great lot. We all know how important it is in Scottish weather to wear the right clothes.

In Scotland it seems you must have a good pair of "wellies" for the rain and the snow. I suppose as Christians we have to pray for the strength of faith from God to stand firm with our 2 feet on the ground. We must constantly ask the lord for his help and guidance to go on carrying his light into this world.

We must wear our jackets of faith at all costs. It will be the only thing that will protect us from the cold winds - the hatred and the hopelessness that surrounds us daily in our world. We must wear our faith and hope everywhere we go openly for everyone to see.

We must also wear gloves of God's love. Everyone we touch must feel the love and welcoming presence of our Lord and saviour. We must also touch our world with the hope that everyone that believes in Jesus Christ as the only saviour is welcome in the heavenly feast.

We must share our blankets of God's holy presence with everyone that needs them even those whom we think is not fitted to be in the presence of God. Those whom we despise because they look different and do things differently

And above all we as Christians must start enjoying the gifts the lord bestowed on us. We must be grateful for everything that comes from his hand and look forward to be part of God's heavenly feast one day. In times of great difficulty turmoil sadness sickness we must never lose hope.

May we never stop convincing all the people that they are welcome in God's presence despite what they wear, who they are, where they shop, or where they live? Holy Communion is about sharing in the hope of God's coming kingdom. It is about our unity and peace in the presence of God. It is a ceremony where we celebrate our unity as brothers and sisters in faith. It is also about sharing God's love with one another. We cannot go from here today untouched. No we must focus deliberately in the days to come on our unity as a congregation in our commitment to the outcasts, the poor and the sick.

Amen

Readings for the week

John 6:24-35

Jesus was under no illusion about why the crowds sought him out - he had given them food to eat. So Jesus spoke to them about working for perishable food or working for food that lasts (v. 27). The crowd had a dialogue with Jesus.

Crowd: What should we do?
Jesus: Believe in the one God has sent.
Crowd: Show us a sign so we can believe.

they tried to manipulate Jesus to give them bread but he broke out of this circular discussion by reminding them it was not Moses but God who supplied bread from heaven. Unrelenting in their quest for bread, the crowd increase their request: 'give us his bread always (v. 34). However, the answer is standing in front of them — 'I am the 'Bread of life' (v. 35). The crowd seemed only to be able to understand Jesus on one level and so failed to recognise what they had seen.