



Sunday Reflection

19th Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 11 October 2020

Pentecost 19

On this nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, we rejoice that, whatever the day or date, God is with us. Whatever our background, God is with us. Whatever mood we are in, God is with us. Whatever may be troubling us, God is with us.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." Matthew 22:8-9

An Illustration to set the scene

Would you turn down an invitation to a royal wedding? Some people might. Perhaps they'd be out of the country, or might be ill. Perhaps they are staunch republicans or simply don't like the royal family of the time. They might even resort to the age-old excuse "I have nothing to wear".

But what if they returned their expensive RSVP card, saying that they would be coming, but then didn't turn up? And what if everyone invited did the same? If you've ever organised a wedding, you'll know how much planning (and expense) can go into the simplest of them. Imagine if you were a monarch who'd planned an extravagant occasion for a beloved son, only to find nobody there. What would you do?

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Jesus tells a parable about such an occasion. Initial invitations were sent out, and people responded. Only when the feast was ready did the king send for those who'd indicated that they'd be attending. So their refusal to come was twice as bad – not only were they finding better things to do with their time than share in the king's rejoicing at his son's nuptials, but they were also going back on their promise to attend.

A parable is a story that Jesus used for a purpose, although not one where everything necessarily rings true. People wouldn't usually kill messengers who told them the banquet was ready. And raising troops to slaughter people on the guest list and destroy their city is a bit extreme. But who is Jesus talking to here? This parable, like the couple before it, is addressed to the chief priests, Pharisees and elders. Earlier they'd recognised that Jesus was talking about them, and that in his parables they were the villains of the piece. And where is Jesus speaking? In the Temple in Jerusalem, the place that claimed a monopoly on correct worship of God. And when is this? Just after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his cleansing of that Temple, when he threw out the money changers and accused the religious authorities of turning God's house into a den of thieves.

Jesus makes clear that those in authority in Jerusalem have got it wrong. They should know their scriptures, know the promises that God and the people of Israel made to one another throughout the Old Testament. But, like guests who fail to show up to a royal wedding, the religious leaders of Israel have gone back on their promises and forgotten their obligations. They've turned down God's invitation and, by introducing strict rules, have made it difficult for others to accept it. The very people who should be first to recognise God's Son and rejoice at the

banquet of salvation were too busy with the business of this world.

So God, like the king, extends the invitation to others – just as Jesus welcomed foreigners, outcasts and “sinners”, and just as Paul spread this good news to the Gentiles beyond the confines of the Holy Land.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

We rejoice today that God invites us to that banquet of salvation, just as we’re invited to share the bread and wine of the Eucharist, to remember how Jesus died and rose again for us. But, like the guest in the later part of the parable, we’re called to respond. Sadly, when the king asked how he’d entered without a wedding robe, the man was speechless. If only he’d said, “Please show me how to get that robe,” or, “I’m not one of the people you originally invited, but your generosity is overwhelming and I thank you.” But he made no response.

To some interpreters the wedding robe has wrongly represented a specific understanding of God, or a particular liturgy. But would Jesus denounce the Pharisees for their strict rules and then introduce more for the Church? The only rules he famously stressed were simply to love God and our neighbours, because rules are less important than relationships – with one another, and with the God whose promise of salvation was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

All Jesus asks is that we don’t let anything prevent us from accepting God’s invitation and keeping our promise. All we need do is respond to such generous love by making God a priority in our lives, whatever our background, whatever clothes we wear.

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Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’s spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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