

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

11th October 2020 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

MATTHEW 22:1-14

COME TO THE BANQUET!

The term, ‘Bridezilla’, is one that you have probably heard before. It is one of those modern-day terms that has taken off, and now even has its own series of TV shows. The term is used to describe those brides who put great demands on people for their wedding: They ‘hire’ and ‘fire’ bridesmaids at will, expect bridesmaids to fork out tens of thousands of dollars to be a part of the bridal party, and can even put strict requirements on guests about things like really stipulating what they can wear. They are the extreme examples of those who want to absolutely control everything about their wedding day so that it is just as they want it to be.

Bridezillas are the extreme, so there is a good chance that you haven’t attended a wedding run by someone who deserves to be on a reality TV show. But with any wedding invitation, across all cultures and all times, there are obligations which come with accepting that invitation we receive. Of course, we are told the time and place we need to be for both the wedding and the reception. There is a normally a dress code stated. Often, to help you out with that difficult task of buying a gift, there is maybe details about a bridal register, a Pinterest site, or a suggestion like; if you wish to put money into our wishing well we are saving to buy a Thermomix, buy a house, go on a good honeymoon, etc. And there is nothing wrong with any of that. Weddings, again across cultures and time, have always been a time to bring people together in celebration, and to help the happy couple to begin their married life in a happy and joyful way with the support and blessings of their family and friends.

In Jesus’ time weddings were a big deal too, with the wedding feast lasting up to a week. Jesus’ first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding, and there a number of parables He tells based around weddings, like this one here.

Luke’s Gospel has this same parable of Jesus and includes a couple of points missing here in Matthew, like the excuses given by those who ‘cannot come’. Mathew has some parts not in Luke, most

notably the killing of the messengers and the revenge of the king in sending in the army against those murderers and their city.

But let's go through what is here. A king is holding a wedding banquet for his son. As was the custom at the time, he had already sent out invites, a 'claim the date' to those he wanted to invite to the wedding. So, people knew the wedding feast was coming and they had plenty of time to get things organised so they would be ready for it. Then, as was custom at that time, when the feast was ready the king sent out a second invitation, saying, 'Everything is ready! Come to the banquet!'

The response? In this version, they don't even bother giving excuses; they have other priorities that they just go and get on with. It didn't matter that they had already had notice of the upcoming feast, their own stuff was more important. Some though, went to extremes, killing the messengers (is that where that saying comes from?).

This king, however, is quick to make things right. He takes revenge on those who have killed his servants, and then he sends the messengers out to people everywhere; everyone, 'good and bad alike' it is stressed, is now invited to this feast.

It is a parable that has a real sting, a warning, to it. Don't turn your back on God's invitation, or be caught up by other priorities, or you will miss out on the new life He invites each one of us to. No doubt many times when this parable has been taught and preached on it has had this strong law warning, with themes like, 'Revenge is mine! Says the Lord', and 'Make sure you stay close to God and always hear His invitation, or you will miss out!'. Some good old fire and brimstone to wake us all up and knock us out of any complacency we might have.

This parable has also often been used to teach about the actions, and their consequences, of those Jewish people who rejected the Saviour they had been waiting so long for, even killing prophets like John the Baptist, and Jesus Himself, and the destruction of their city, Jerusalem, 40 or so years after Jesus' life on earth.

The warning, and the reminder of what happened to God's people who rejected Jesus, are certainly in here. And yet, when we look at it closely, through the eyes of the God who loves us, through eyes of the God who sent Jesus to save us, through the eyes of the God who we know invites us every day to be a part

of His kingdom, His banquet feast, what we see here then is a story of God's grace. The king didn't give up. He gave those who were first invited warning and time to prepare, it was their choice to not use that opportunity to be ready. And then, against normal custom back then, the king sent out a third invitation. He just wanted his banquet hall to be filled. He wanted people to be at his celebration. He was totally indiscriminate about who he invited. All were welcome to come to the banquet.

The last section of the parable can be a bit difficult to understand. It can be taken as a strong warning about what happens when we don't come to God in the way He calls us to. And yes, that is certainly there. But around that, and more importantly, is the fact that the king has given all of his invited guests the clothes to wear for the banquet. Not only does he put on the banquet, he does all he can to make them ready for banquet! All they have to do, all we have to do, is to have that attitude of accepting all that is done for us, and that attitude is called; faith. Without that, like the guest here, we have no excuse. We can't come by ourselves. We can't come on our own terms. We can't come when and as we want. We can only come on the basis of the invitation we are given, but the good news for us is that this is an invitation of grace; God accepting us, God doing everything He can to keep us with Him.

Jesus told parables so that He could use things that people knew about, like attending weddings, to teach them truths about God's kingdom; like this one they often start with, 'The Kingdom of heaven is like ...' So, what do we learn here? Just a few points:

We learn here that God's grace, again His forgiveness, His invitation to come for good and bad alike to Him, this grace keeps being offered to us. Grace is a free gift, and a gift which keeps on being offered to us, until it is too late. The king didn't have to send out a third invite, he did it because he wanted to fill his banquet hall. God wants as many people as possible to be with Him.

Don't make the invitation into an obligation, but don't make excuses either. Live in the new life, living in God's love and care, right now. Enjoy it without being weighed down by expectations you can't live up to. It is an invitation to a joyful celebration. Don't guilt yourself, but also look to how you can respond to everything that both has been and is being done for you.

We put on Jesus to come to the banquet. Jesus' innocence, His purity, His perfectness, His obedience, having put these clothes on in our baptism we are now rightly dressed to come. Come humbly.

We don't come offering anything of ourselves, but simply saying, 'Thank you, Lord, that in Jesus you have made us ready and worthy for your kingdom'.

And finally, we are now the servants, the messengers, who are sent out. As those who know the banquet and all it has to offer, God calls us to go out and through our lives, our words, our actions, to let others know about this kingdom also. It won't always be easy. Thankfully, we won't be killed for this message, although sadly that still happens in some parts of the world even today. People may think we are strange, they may even ridicule us. But there are many, even here in our own country, our own community, who have never really had the chance to hear this invitation God gives to everyone. People who need to hear that Christians aren't just weird, or killjoys full of 'thou shalt nots', or that we aren't against everything and everyone. People who need to know and see that as Christians we are just like them, and that we have hope and peace now which is worth sharing because it changes lives, and it gives us a great new life to look forward to also.

The teaching of Jesus here in this parable: Come to the banquet, to my kingdom, there is a place for each and everyone of you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

Conflicting Priorities

Just like the first lot of invitees in this parable, we are sometimes too busy, or our lives too full of other things, to take up the invitation we are given to come fully into God's kingdom.

- What things in your life stop you from putting God first in your life? This could be relationships, work, leisure activities, possessions?
- Are there areas of your spiritual life which are neglected because of a lack of time, energy or space for God in them, eg, attending worship, Bible reading and prayer, service to God and others?
- What can you do or change to redirect this balance of priorities so you can take up God's invitation to live fully in His kingdom?

Going Out As A Messenger

Thank God that unlike some of the messengers in this parable we don't risk death when we take the message of His kingdom out to the world. As a member of His kingdom we are now all called to take the message of His love out to others in our lives.

- What can sometimes stop you from taking the message of the kingdom out to others? Perhaps fear of embarrassment or ridicule, not knowing what to say, not knowing how to see the opportunities?
- Are there people in your life; friends, acquaintances, colleagues, family, who you feel are ready to hear this message of God's love?
- Being a messenger isn't just about 'Bible bashing' but can also be the message which comes through how we live and how we treat people. What gifts do you believe God has given you to be a spreader of his message?
- Ask God to help you to both see the opportunities He gives you to witness to Him, and to lead you to do this in a way which is most effective for that person at that time.