

Sunday 11th October 2020 – Trinity 18 [Year A]

Psalm 23

Matthew 22:1-14

Homily

Theme: Accepting invitations

Today Jesus is telling one of his parables and at first reading, perhaps a superficial reading, the story seems unfair - particularly the ending. But let's trust Jesus that there is a really important message he is trying to get across both then and for us today. After all it does begin 'The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to' ... so we should take notice.

Jesus tells of a magnificent wedding feast prepared by a king for his son, to which all the important and notable people have been invited. But they all make excuses not to come and even mistreat the king's messengers or kill them. The chief priests and the Pharisees are in the listening crowd and they are already aware that Jesus had spoken about them with the parable of the 'Wicked Tenants' they'd heard recently. They represented to Jesus the religious leaders of the time – the self- confident church who should have been the first to recognise Jesus for who he truly was, but instead chose to work against the kingdom. Jesus was too radical and countercultural for their tastes and they wanted to hold on to their status and power.

Today's first reading, the 23rd Psalm is one that we all know well. I learned it by rote in Junior School (King James version, of course) and still know it off by heart. Even though it is so familiar, it is still worth examining the psalm afresh; "The Lord is my shepherd" .. Try putting more emphasis on "is", then on "is my". One of my Sunday school prizes was a book called "Anne's Secret Garden" where a young girl from a non-Church-going family became a Christian. She struggled with this psalm. Her first concern was whether "I shall not want" meant that she could have the doll she coveted in the local toy shop window. It was explained to her that there was a difference between want and need – although she'd have loved to own the doll, she had a loving family and enough to eat – she did not want. But then came the important question from the lovely old Scottish gardener who was also her Sunday School teacher. Yes, but *is* the Lord your shepherd? Have you invited **him** into **your** heart?

And then we come to the, at first, unlikely link between our two readings. In the psalm, we read "you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies". So, in both passages there is reference to being, in modern language, wined and dined. And in both, it is *our* choice to be there at the table. In the Psalm, the Lord leads – he does *not* drive. To follow is our choice. **Jesus** has a message of hope for us too, as we are all called to the banquet. We are in his eyes special guests invited to share in the celebration of God's kingdom but we have to decide whether we are going or not!

The end of the parable is a hard read – why invite someone if you are then going to punish them for not wearing the right clothes? But Jesus has a vital point to make here for us all and we need to be attentive. Simply he is saying to us that it is not good enough just to accept the invitation and 'turn up' (in the

example of the over confident chief priests and Pharisees who thought they already knew it all and had nothing else to learn – not even from Jesus). Jesus' harsh words are a warning to us all not to fall into the same trap and be seed that falls in shallow earth. The kingdom of God is not a place for our lives to wither on the vine, but a joyous place of hope, openness, new growth and honest labour.

Of course, we may not see ourselves as the first to be invited and those to turn down the invitation, so, if not, do we see ourselves among those who *did* come? - the labourers of this world, the down and outs, the poor and needy. They had nothing to boast about, no gift to bring, and most likely came for the food to feed their hunger.

In this sense the parable becomes *our* story because we are the recipients of God's generosity and hospitality. Remember we are Christians today by God's graciousness rather than anything that we may have done. Just like the people in the parable, whom God is bothered about, we too are invited as guests by God to his celebration.

In the midst of the truly uncertain world that we currently face, the message of this parable should bring us great reassurance and hope for the future. Our lives are significant in the eyes of God and we are cared for and watched over. This realisation itself should make us want to change the way that we approach our lives, so that with a new sense of peace we can step forward with a renewed sense of purpose for ourselves and, importantly, for our church.

But sadly, for many people this is still not the case and they ignore the blessings that God wants to give, and rely only on their own worldliness. The message Jesus gives is simple but stark - if you choose not to go then someone else will - in your place.

For this reason, if for no other, we should not be slow. but willing to answer God's call on our lives and give that life fully to him and the work to be done together, to build his kingdom here on earth.

Amen

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