

“Kingdom Party” - Matthew 22.1-10 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Have you been to a great party lately? Have you missed a great party lately? Have you ever thrown a great party and have no one show up? If you have answered “yes” to any of these questions, then this parable of Jesus is for you. Before we go any further, allow me to talk about parables as the preferred teaching method of Jesus. These are short stories to capture the attention of the listener to listen to one thing but learn a lesson that might then be applied to something else. It is the basis of fairy tales and fables. I hope you all know that the story of the three pigs is not about pigs or a big bad wolf, it is about building hurricane proof houses if you live in Florida or doing what you need to do to be safe and secure from a threat.

The parables of Jesus are like that. They tell a good story, but they also tell an ultimate truth about God. And most of the parables are used by Jesus, like this one today, to tell about the kingdom of heaven. Now in the gospels, two terms are used to talk about the same thing. “The kingdom of heaven” is preferred by Matthew and “The kingdom of God” is preferred by Luke. These are terms to describe what it is like to follow Jesus. They are not descriptions of heaven as in the afterlife after death, but the life living here and now as a disciple of Jesus. For the early church it was a version of the afterlife as they saw a change in life from before meeting Jesus to the life after meeting Jesus, and can even talk of baptism as symbolically dying to the old way of life and being born again into the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is global and is timeless as it involves all disciples including those first ones who entered in nearly two thousand years ago, and those nearer to us who passed on into the heavenly side of the kingdom. Broaden your mind and grasp this kingdom as the family of God down through history and into the future. It is the community of faith that does include the saints who have gone before us, whom we will celebrate on All Saint’s Weekend in a few weeks. So this celebration in today’s parable is perhaps a foretaste of the next celebration when we get to heaven and are reunited with those who have gone on before us. But the parable is not talking about heaven, but what we experience here as followers of Jesus.

Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a great party and in ancient Judaism the greatest party was a wedding feast or banquet. It was a celebration not just for the family but for the community. In John chapter two, the first miracle of Jesus is described as turning water into wine at a wedding where his mother and he were in attendance, and all the disciples came along as well. As Jesus compared that and probably many other weddings he had attended in his lifetime to what he was experiencing as he tried to invite people to come and believe in the Good News about the kingdom of heaven. The faithful religious people of his day were not interested and would not, so to speak, come to the party. But others who were out at the edge of society and on the outs with the Jewish leaders those who were not always welcomed to the holy gatherings of the righteous in crowd, were clamoring to come and hear the Good News. In this story Jesus invites them to God’s Party.

Several years ago in Atlanta Georgia, there was an elaborate wedding scheduled at a large suburban church. A wealthy debutante was engaged to marry an equally wealthy businessman, and a lavish reception was to follow. Just hours before the wedding, the groom got cold feet! He left his bride – literally – standing alone at the altar. The wedding, of course, was immediately cancelled. But what would they do with all that food? It had already been paid for and prepared. A newspaper article the next day reported that buses were sent to the Salvation Army and

several downtown shelters. They brought street people to the country club, where they sampled fresh crab and lobster, and other delicacies well into the night. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven IS a party like that!

If you have never felt invited, today, here and now, YOU'RE INVITED! We invite you to come to the party – the celebration of Jesus and his invitation into a new life with him. And let's prayerfully consider today who has been left out and how we might invite them to come to the party? The kingdom is here and now. Alleluia and Amen.

We're a Part of God's Family

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 10/10/23

We're a part of God's family.
All are welcome like you and me.
We celebrate when lost are found,
Reunited on holy ground.

Good News is proclaimed unto all,
Invited to the banquet hall.
Today we are each the honored guest.
Praise the Lord in whose name we're blessed.

Today whom might we each invite,
To perceive through God's holy light,
That they are loved and welcomed in,
And in Christ a new life begin.