

“Thanks, but no thanks...I’m busy...can’t be bothered...Maybe next time...”

Such is the parade of excuses offered in this ‘parable of the kingdom.’ Perhaps you remember the song? But as Jesus once again paints a picture for us, it’s worth noting that the comparison is not the banquet; not a lavish feast; ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding banquet for his son.’

Maybe it’s not about the food, or the decoration. It’s not about the eternal party. It’s about the invitation... and the response.

The banquet is ready. There’s cause for celebration. The welcome is wide and sincere. But there are problems. Big problems. Not just indifference, but violence and outrage. The host has high expectations, and even those invited as a ‘second choice’ are measured by those high standards. And this is what the kingdom of heaven may be like?

Look Jesus, we’ve been through this before. These complicated, mystical comparisons aren’t helping. Tell it to us straight. Forget metaphor. Just give us something we can feel good about...

The last sentence in today’s reading points to the problem: “Many are called, few are chosen.” This makes it sound like God is rather hard to please, holding high and easily changeable standards. (Really – thrown out for wearing the wrong clothes?) What’s the sense of accepting this invitation if you can’t measure up to the dress code?

Jesus’ parables aren’t often seen as prophetic. They are comparisons – laying out eternal puzzles and problems using language and images that we can relate to. But sometimes – this time – it seems like Jesus might be offering a little ‘good

news/bad news.’ A hint of hope with a fair measure of caution. Yes, the ‘party’ is on. And you are invited. So, what are you going to do with that invitation?

Maybe our Wednesday study group is having an effect. Maybe all our time spent with Amos – a prophet of passion; a purveyor of perpetual warning – is training me to caution where this parable is concerned. For it would be easy to declare (after reading Matthew 22 very quickly) that heaven is waiting for you, so long as you keep the faith and follow the rules TO THE LETTER. There will be a sorting, then another. Always keep your guard up where God is concerned.

You could come to that conclusion. Many have.

But knowing what I know about prophets - and about Jesus – this may just be a cautionary tale about attitude. This may be a parable about our complacency. The kingdom of heaven is one thing. Our approach to it is quite another.

The many are called / few are chosen tagline offers the clue we need. Jesus is not talking about eternal reward here. This is the kingdom of now – the change God is bringing, one attitude at a time – one changed life at a time – on EARTH as in heaven, is the petition of the prayer that we often gloss over. The ‘kingdom’ is understood to be taking shape. Designed by God, described by Jesus and brought to life by those who would ‘take up their cross and follow.’ And there are lots of folks who seem encouraged by that idea – some who come to the party full of energy and enthusiasm – and there are some who just aren’t interested.

In the language of the parable, there are invitations in the mail, to a wide and wonderful collection of folks. And the question of the parable seems to be ‘are you here out of curiosity, or did you come to dance?’

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who planned a wedding banquet for his son, but that banquet doesn't get off the ground unless the guests are in the banqueting mood. The party can be ruined (I speak from experience) by the attitude of the party goers. The dance floor is dull – the dinner conversation falls flat – there's a fight at the bar. No one tells good stories the next day.

The parable seems to suggest that this kingdom of heaven – the thing many long for – the kingdom Jesus proclaims – will rise or fall because of us.

God has designed it. Jesus proclaims it. We must make it happen.

And according to Jesus – in full prophet mode – this kind of work is not for everyone. So, what's to be done?

Do we give up on the idea? Call it quits – let God work around us? I'm not sure that's an option.

We could, I suppose, worry a little less about the 'eternal kingdom' and look around our corner of the world – see what might need some attention...see where a little grace, mercy and love might be applied. We could put on the garments of faithfulness and tenderness and love of neighbour. We could dance a little.

The bad news is easy to find. It would be far simpler to leave it all to God; to trust in the eternal sorting and sifting that is elsewhere promised as a sign of the 'eternal kingdom.' But Jesus calls for action in this life. Jesus is risen and that means life is forever changed – present and future. The party is on, and we are invited. The tables are set and the band is tuned up. The kingdom waits on us. Who's ready to be the life of the party?