

The parable of the wedding banquet has lots for us to look at but I would like to look at one particular verse, in verse 11 we are told that the king notices that a man is not wearing a wedding robe and throws him out. At first sight we might be shocked that the Kingdom of heaven throws someone out for not being dressed appropriately, but we will see as we unpick this later that there is more to this than outward appearance.

But before we get to that let's take a moment to reflect on those who do not fit in, like the man who is not dressed appropriately. What of those we meet on our streets who are ragged, unkempt and our reaction to them? I remember a talk given by a fellow student when I was training and she spoke of loving the unlovable. If you have ever been on Campo Lane when people are coming and going into the Cathedral Archer Project you might think some of them are unlovable. However hard they are to love, the Archer Project reaches out to them.

For some they will just help them to survive but for others they will be part of a transformation that sees a life turned round so they can take their place in society again. Amazing people doing an amazing job that is only possible because of the support they get from people like you and me. This is a glimpse of Kingdom work which we are privileged to support.

But back to our Gospel reading. I shall return to the man at the feast who was not dressed properly, because really my question for us today is are we that man?

However, let's start by setting the scene for today's parable. We are in the final week of Jesus' time on earth. He has ridden into Jerusalem triumphantly, he has caused a storm in the temple and trouble is for sure brewing. The Pharisees, the elders, the Sadducees are plotting Jesus' downfall. And in this parable Jesus starts by addressing them. You or I might have given up on this group who wanted nothing but ruin for Jesus, but I think Jesus still wants to reach out to them. He reminds them that they have been invited into the Kingdom of Heaven but they have not accepted the invitation, is this another chance for them to see what is right in front of them and turn to Jesus? Yet they chose to ignore what was on offer, being too busy with their normal lives to go to the banquet or even worse maltreating the people who came with the invite. Even killing them. It has a familiar ring doesn't it? Too busy to be bothered with that right now – perhaps another time.

But the banquet is ready and so the King invites everyone from the streets, everyone that his slaves come across. And for many of us somewhere in our lives the people working for the king have come across us in the streets and invited us in.

Amazing isn't it that ordinary people like us have been invited in. I wonder if we might be tempted to just get stuck in that warm glow of acceptance and not think beyond it. God meets us where we are and loves us and forgives us, might we therefore think that that is it. Of course our past is irrelevant in so far as we cannot lose our place in the kingdom because of the lives we once had, neither can we earn a place in the Kingdom by doing good works. It is through God's grace that we are invited in. If you like it's his love and forgiveness that are the gateway for us. We have only to believe. But is that the end of the story - this parable clearly shows us that there is more to this. And so we return to the man who was not properly dressed at the banquet so we can ask are we.

To take our place at the banquet we must be transformed. Remember how Jesus never said to the blind and the lame you are amazing as you are - welcome. He told them their sins were forgiven and healed them. That is his message for us too. Accepting the invitation to be part of the Kingdom of God here on earth is about wanting to be transformed. It goes beyond a head thing, it is about becoming a new person. You see you can't be in the Kingdom if you haven't changed. Let me just re-read v 11 from our reading. "But when the king came in to see the guests he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe." Among all the guests that are at the banquet the king spots the one person not dressed for the occasion. The person who has made no effort. Did he think it didn't matter because he had been invited in and that was it? I wonder if the man had thought he would keep under the radar and not be spotted. Do we think we can keep under the radar and Jesus won't know what's truly in our hearts. Do we think we can get away with still leading our old lives before we accepted Jesus' invitation? Well here Jesus clearly tells us that we can't. To choose not to be changed is to choose not to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I know I'm work in progress, but I believe that God knows where my heart is, he knows that I believe in Jesus. We cannot be perfect, but we can accept God's invitation wholeheartedly without provisos, without hoping that we can just go on as before hoping to get away with

it! We must be born again, transformed. I believe that it is complete change God wants, it's not enough to modify our behaviour; we need to cast off the old so we can put on the new. Paul tells the church at Colossae that as God's chosen people, who are holy and dearly loved, they should clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. That's what its like to be dressed appropriately for the banquet – to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. That's how we should be dressed. These are qualities that should shape our day to day lives.

Today is our harvest celebration. A day when we thank God for all his gifts. As we thank God for all he has given us will we act with compassion and kindness and share our gifts with others? As God has been generous with us will we be generous.

Of course I'm talking about our support for the Cathedral Archer Project, but what of the gift of faith, are we generous in sharing that with others?

In Jesus' parable the king sends people out into the streets to invite everyone they find to the banquet. In Paul's letter to the Romans (chapter10) Paul says that "how are they to believe in whom they have never heard? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? For it is written "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news".

May we never forget that we have an amazing story to share. Amen