

TFTD 23.29:

Saturday March 25th

Matt 22.1-14

Just as I am



Pilgrims tucking into St Peter's fish by the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus said, Look! The feast I have prepared for you is ready. Come to the wedding banquet. Matthew 22.4

Wedding invitations these days are often preceded by a “save the date” card. Venues are booked and plans are made so far ahead, you want to make sure your guests are free to come on the day. In Jesus’ day, you got the invite first. You knew you

were invited to the wedding, but you didn't know exactly when you'd get the message to say "Come along — it's all ready for you!"

But once the summons came, it would be the height of rudeness to saunter in late, or not to bother putting on your best party clothes: you were expected to drop everything and hasten to the feast. The idea of refusing at this stage was not just discourteous, it was downright insulting — especially if the invitation came from the king.

So the king's angry reactions in this parable (vv.7, 13) make some sense in Jesus' social world. But there's something odd about the way Matthew retells the story. Matthew seems to heighten the grisly details of punishment, in a way that seems out of all proportion to what was after all a social gaffe (Luke tells the story rather differently: see Luke 14.16-24). For Matthew and his community, the story had a deeper meaning: it was an allegory about the rejection of God's Son, and like the prophets of the Old Testament, Matthew sees that the results can be catastrophic.

But as Jesus tells it, this is a parable about the

astounding generosity of the host in the story. To prepare a banquet (even more, a wedding feast) and invite the world, and then to have your generosity thrown back in your face, would be upsetting to any of us — doubly so in a Middle Eastern culture where an insult to someone's honour was deeply felt. But the feast (and the food) must not be wasted — so if the original guests won't come, the host must find some more. He sends out his staff to scour the streets, and the wedding reception is filled with guests. A kind of first-century foodbank, you might say!

God's invitation to the kingdom of heaven will not go wasted. The "top people" are invited, like everyone else — but if they won't come, God will find other guests. The people on the margins, the tax-collectors and prostitutes (who recognized John as a messenger from God — see 21.32) will gladly come into the kingdom. Even the Gentiles will find their way into the feast (8.11), to eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table (15.27).

But what about the final paragraph, where the hapless wedding guest is thrown out for transgressing the dress code? Isn't that a bit over

the top? Well, of course it is — it's an exaggerated scenario, meant to make its hearers sit up and take notice. But the point is that the host in this story invites his guests to come in just as they are — off the street, or working in the fields, grubby and sweaty, with no chance to run home and freshen up. You or I would say, "I'm not dressed for this — I don't feel right — let me go home and sort myself out first." But because it's a party, the host himself provides wedding robes for all his guests — he makes them fit for the occasion.

People often feel like that about coming to church — or praying: "Oh, I couldn't possibly — I'm not good enough. I need to sort myself out first." But God invites us to come "just as we are." He doesn't wait for us to sort ourselves out. He offers to wash us clean, to give us his Spirit, to clothe us with Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' love and compassion — to make us fit for the Kingdom of heaven. Church isn't a place for perfect people. It's the place we come to learn together how to become the people God wants us to be.

Behold, the dinner is prepared, .. and all things are ready. Pardon is ready, peace is ready, comfort is

**ready; the promises are ready, and heaven, at last,
is ready to receive us. Is all this ready; and shall we
be unready? Is all this preparation made for us; and
is there any room to doubt of our welcome?**

Matthew Henry