

Sermon  
19 Pentecost—Proper 23-A-2  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
October 11, 2020  
William Bradbury

Isaiah 25:1-9  
Psalm 23  
Philippians 4:1-9  
Matthew 22:1-14

Thursday night I had a dream:

I'm going to my daughter's wedding which is being held somewhere inside a large shopping mall. When I enter, I put down my suit jacket and go wandering off, but then I can't remember where I left it. Further, I realize I'm wearing a red plaid shirt which is inappropriate for a formal wedding. I go through the mall looking for my jacket and wondering from whom I might be able to borrow a shirt—and a tie. Finally, I tell myself it's a good thing I'm just the father of the bride and not part of the wedding party!

End of dream.

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I, along with many clergy, have a similar dream in which it's time for the service to start and I can't find my vestments or I've forgotten to write my sermon. I know teachers and other professionals who've had similar dreams.

None of my dreams, though, have lasted long enough for there to be consequences. I always wake up before I get laughed at or punished for being unprepared.

But in Jesus' parable, which he says reveals something about the Realm of God, the guy without the proper robe gets caught and thrown out into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

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Before we talk about the man who gets thrown out, we have to recognize **that the first and central point**, not to be missed, is that **everyone** is invited to the party. Those who receive formal invitations are invited twice. Then, when these first ones don't show up, those just walking around town are invited. **Thus, all are invited to the Wedding feast of the son.**

To those first hearing this story Jesus is saying that both the religious leaders, the priests, scribes, and Pharisees, are invited, as well as the regular folk, which are characterized as both the “good and the bad.”

We’ve got to pause a minute to hear the scandal of what is really being said: **“all are invited” means both those who love our president and those who don’t receive an invitation to God’s party.**

If this is the case maybe we can understand why some choose not to go: Just like there are many who are trying to figure out how to avoid the family Thanksgiving dinner, so they won’t have to listen to their crazy relatives who are on the opposite side.

I mean, how am I going to be able to enjoy my dinner listening to THOSE people rant and rave—either about how their candidates won or how they lost.

The pandemic protocols have kept parishes from having to face this dilemma by keeping the churches closed. Of course, many churches have weeded out opposing political viewpoints, so many church gatherings are the gathering of the like-minded.

Starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the translation of the Bible and the liturgy into the vernacular, many churches lost their diversity: the English went to one church, the French to another, the Poles to another. Then, after the Civil War the Universal Church got further divided with former slaves going to one church and former slave owners going to another.

Sociologically, this makes perfect sense. Theologically, it was a disaster of the first order, because in fragmenting, the Church abandoned one of the central tenets of the gospel: in Christ there is not male or female, rich or poor, slave or free, because in Christ God has knit us together into One New Humanity. See Ephesians chapter 2. When we abandon the One New Humanity, we abandon Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

Just imagine: **If from the beginning of our country the churches practiced this One New Humanity in Christ, there would not have been race, class, or ethnic discrimination.**

So, of primary importance in this parable is an image of God’s all-inclusive Realm. At All Saints’, Chelmsford the invitation to receive Communion goes: “Whoever you are, wherever you are on your journey of Faith, come to the holy table to receive the Supper of the Lamb.”

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**But secondly, if we want to stay at the party, we must know it will cost us. Jesus says it will cost us our lives when he tells us to take up our cross and follow him.**

The despised tax-collectors don’t get to stay at the party if they continue to cheat the people. Much respected businessmen and women don’t

get to stay, if they only care about the bottom line and not about the people who are in the factories making the products.

**You and I don't get to stay at God's party, if we are not willing to let go of our robe—which is my ego-based life—and put on the robe of a Jesus-shaped life.**

Yes! Love comes to us all. The Good Shepherd will even go in search of that one lost sheep.

**But** Love doesn't leave us where we are. Love fundamentally changes us by luring us toward transformation into Christ.

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This parable demands that we face the question: "What does following Jesus cost?" Not cost us once, but every day we seek to follow Christ.

**If our commitment to Christ doesn't cost us money, time, effort, and painful inner growth, we are not trying hard enough.**

The man without the proper robe is **silent** in the face of the Kings' question. If we're not willing to engage the king, even to ask for his help, we are not trying hard enough.

**If our allegiance to Jesus isn't stronger than our allegiance to our political opinions, we are not trying hard enough.**

**Author Anne Lamott puts it this way: "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."**

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**What does this commitment to Jesus look like in its starkest form?**

Baptist preacher Will Campbell was born in 1926 and grew up in Mississippi. He became the model for the character Will B Dunn in the Kudzu comic strip. A New York Times article when he died a few years ago, said that Will Campbell, "was the only white person invited by Dr. [Martin Luther] King, Jr. to the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in 1957."

"Yet, Campbell also came to believe that "Christ died for bigots as well as devout people [which] prompted his contacts with the Ku Klux Klan". He'd go drink whiskey with them on their porches to learn why they were the way they were. "He even visited James Earl Ray in prison after the 1968 assassination of ... Dr. King. He was widely criticized for both actions." JUNE 4, 2013

But Campbell was simply trying to live into Dr. King's Dream of a world in which we reach across our differences in love.

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All are invited to the Wedding of the Son with Creation.

And all are required, day by day, to take off the comfortable robe that protects our privilege and as Saint Paul says, "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 13.14 Which, of course, is the work of the Spirit.