

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 15, 2017      The Rev. Webster Maughan

Our Gospel lesson for today is one of the more interesting parables in the Gospels. In fact, it appears twice – once here in Matthew, and again in Luke. Scholars believe that the author of Matthew and the author of Luke shared a common source (called “Q”). The parable centers around invitations to a wedding banquet, and the people who were invited.

It seems that the people that the King wanted to attend would not come. It seems they have “other business” to attend to, and they make excuses to the King’s slaves. Matthew goes so far as to suggest that some of the invited guests killed the slaves in order to get rid of them.

Next, the King, who does not want to waste his preparations, and probably embarrass the Bride and groom, tells his slaves to go and bring in anyone they find, and thus filled the hall.

That is the first part of the story. The second part is the part that is hard to understand and accept. Once the “anyone they could find” have arrived, the King sees one who “is not wearing a wedding garment.” Of course our logical minds question this – “how does he know?” How can the King expect him to conform when he didn’t even know he would be coming to a wedding banquet. Luke does not include this paragraph, but let us remember that the Gospels are teaching about Jesus and his ministry. We are in trouble if we try to take passages like this literally. The King then has his attendants bind his hands and feet, and cast him into “the outer darkness.”

As I said before, this is a teaching. The message here is twofold, I think. First, the Kingdom of Heaven is not necessarily for those who think they are shoe-ins. For Jesus, it was the religious hierarchy: Scribes and Pharisees. Instead, Jesus is consistent in his message that any of us are able to gain entrance to the Kingdom. But beware if we think that there are no expectations of us, because there are. He doesn’t tell us here – and that is why we need to take the Bible as a whole document, not just a small passage. Throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, the expectations are clear: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, and put others ahead of ourselves.

In my time at Emmanuel – and I have been visiting ever since my first grandson was baptized in 1997, and am now here permanently, I have seen this congregation struggle to do just that. And while I commend you for your efforts – for our efforts – there are still many hungry, naked and sick and lonely people around. Jesus told his disciples that we will always have the poor and hungry around.

So, to take the most from this teaching that we can, let’s think about it this way: we are all invited to the Kingdom. Some of us will accept the

invitation and some will ignore it. Some of us will arrive prepared to enter, and some will not. And it is up to us. Unlike that unfortunate man in Matthew's story, we know what Jesus expects of us. To respond to the needs of the world around us is to understand that we are God's hands and feet, - unbound as they are, now - and that in the creation there are those who need help, and those who can provide that help.

You have discovered many ways to respond to Jesus' calling: food pantries and meals, working with other faith communities to share the burdens, giving, working, praying, I have seen the glory of God in the faces here in this community, and I hope we all - myself included - can respond to the needs we see and keep our hands and feet unbound and active for the furtherance of the Kingdom of Heaven.