

What a horrible Parable! With HAMAS committing Terrorist acts against Israel, Russia attacking Ukraine Why would we be asked to thank GOD for this Parable as being The Word of the LORD?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John each preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God as evangelism. In addition to affirming and reaffirming what we believe Jesus said, did, and represented to the world, all 4 name his Baptism, Communion and Crucifixion happened; AND we also pay attention to differences. For Mark, the Temple, the holiest of places, the only place to atone for our sins, had just been destroyed; and Jesus is put forward as a better sacrifice, by a greater High Priest than the Temple could have provided. Matthew is preaching this Gospel to a Community, who like Jesus and his Disciples had been Ethnically, Historically, Religiously JEWISH now Christian, so everything Jesus says is in reference to Old Testament. Luke's Gospel is to a NON-JEWISH/Gentile, Greco-Roman Community who have become Christian.

Neither Mark or John include this Parable of a Great Feast. Matthew and Luke do, but differently, so differently that throughout my ordained ministry whenever this passage from Matthew was appointed, I shifted to the Luke version instead. Luke's is the version where, when people receive the "Save the Date" notice each has a shallow excuse, one says he purchased a business he has to inspect, one got married and needs to meet the bride, a third bought a field he needs to walk, and a fourth oxen he needs to see.

Matthew is reminding his congregation who knew their Hebrew Scriptures by memory of Isaiah 25, which we have used word for word in our Call to Worship and Call to Prayer. While we have nostalgic feelings about The Garden of Eden, Mount Sinai and the Tomb of Jesus' Resurrection; for Israel, there are many different mountains, where Moses saw the Burning Bush, and received the Commandments, where Elijah fought the contest with the Priests of Baal, where Jesus preached The Sermon on the Mount, the Mount of the Transfiguration and the Mountain where Jesus went to Pray. BUT there is one mountain, Mount MORIAH, which is THE same MOUNTAIN God led Abraham to, the mountain where Abraham was told to take Isaac to Sacrifice, the same mountain where David created the Capital city of Jerusalem as the City devoted to God, the same mountain where Solomon built the original Temple. Elsewhere in Isaiah the Apocalyptic Hope is described as the day when all the Nations of the world will come to worship at GOD's HOLY MOUNTAIN. At Isaiah 25, our Call to Worship described the GREAT FEAST that would be that day, this is also a reminder of Psalm 23 "You prepare a Table before me in the presence of my enemies..."

Isaiah struggles with GOD inviting all the Nations of the world, while there is still EVIL in the world. So while there is description of this lavish feast, and the LORD swallowing up Death, wiping away every tear, removing every disgrace and shame// the very next words describe that MOAB will be trampled down in manure, bringing down their pride to the dust. The Bible does not offer Cheap Grace, that everyone is forgiven all the sins of the world without first acknowledgement and repentance of wrongs.

Matthew takes this to extremes in this parable. There is a King who does not represent GOD, perhaps more like King Herod, or Caesar, or the leader of a TERRORIST PEOPLE who abuses Power to demand Respect. The FEAST OF GOD for Matthew has become a WEDDING FEAST, picking up on the idea of Jesus being the Bridegroom. While some of those who are invited have weak excuses, Matthew says others had no excuse and murdered the messengers of the King. In retaliation for what those people had done, the King orders the City Burned and these who rejected the invitation to be hunted down and killed! In the process, innocent men, women, grandparents and children were killed.

In Luke's version, the people CUT OFF Themselves by not coming to the Feast; In Matthew, the KING burns and murders, then casts outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

At which point Matthew includes something which was not in Luke 14's Parable.

When the King comes into the Hall for the Feast, he recognizes One who did not have on a Wedding Garment. Now, there is an important cultural clue that was left out of Matthew's Parable. The modern-day remnants of tradition are that: at a Wedding, guests are asked whether they are friends of the Bride or Friends of the Groom, and the Groomsmen wear matching Suits, while the Bride picks the ugliest dresses possible for her Bridesmaids to wear in matching colors. In the Roman Era, as ALL of the guests arrived for the wedding, each was given a Wedding Garment to wear, something like a family Uniform, either matching the color of the Groom's family or of the Bride's family, much like The Vikings in Purple and the Packers in Green. Which with the Orange of our Sanctuary would really be something!

The standard interpretation of this is that this man only came for a free meal and not in the spirit of attending a Wedding, so we should all worship God as if coming to a wedding with joy and love. Matthew even includes a Moral like one of Aesop's Fables: "For many are called but few are chosen" which better fits Luke's version of everyone being invited, and several simply choosing to not participate.

To me, the Hostility of the King in Matthew's Parable, much like Isaiah's Feast /juxtaposed with/ condemning Moab, seems instead of Jesus entertaining Sinners, or Many are Called and few are Chosen, to be a parable about the Anxiety of our wanting to condemn Evil while Offering GOD's GRACE to all.

I wonder if in Jesus' original telling of this Parable, the Man who did not wear a Wedding Garment for One Team or for the Other, may have been Jesus himself?! If in Anxiety and Anger, people want their KING to have the man bound hand and foot for not obeying the Law; when the Man who does not wear a Wedding Garment is all of the Innocent Citizens!

This week, I came upon an American Fable, that fits with the World's ANXIETY about Palestine and Israel, Russia and Ukraine, China and Taiwan, this Parable from A.A. Milne

"Piglet" said Winnie the Pooh. "Yes" said Piglet. "I'm scared," For a moment there was silence.

"Would you like to talk about it?" asked Piglet, when Pooh did not appear to be saying anything further.

"I'm just scared," blurted out Pooh. "Anxious, because I don't feel like things are getting better. If anything, I feel like they might be getting worse. People are angry, because they are so scared, and they are turning on one another, and there seems to be no clear plan out of where we are. I worry about my friends and the people I love, and I wish SO MUCH that I could give them all a hug. And Oh, Piglet! I am so scared, I cannot tell you how much I wish it wasn't so."

Piglet was thoughtful, as he looked out at the blue of the sky, peeping between the branches of trees in the Hundred Acre Wood, and listened to his friend.

"I am here," Piglet said simply. "I am here, and I hear you."

For a moment Pooh was perplexed.

"But... aren't you going to tell me not to be a silly old bear? That I should stop getting myself into a state, and to pull myself together? That it's hard for everyone right now and everyone is scared?"

"No" said Piglet quite decisively. "No, I am very much not going to do any of those things."

"But..." said Pooh "I cannot change the world right now," continued Piglet.

"And I am not going to patronize you with platitudes about how everything will be okay, because I do not know that. I cannot make those anxious feelings go away, not really. But I can Promise you, that all the time I have breath left in my body... you won't ever need to feel those Anxious Feelings alone."

And it was a strange thing, because even as Piglet said all that, Pooh could feel some of those Anxious Feelings start to loosen their grip on him, and he could feel one or two of them start to slither away into the forest, cowed by Pooh's friend, who sat there stolidly beside him.

Pooh thought he had never before been more grateful to have Piglet in his life.