

(personal+) In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saint Matthew Chapter 22 and verse 9, *“Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”*

Throwing a party can be a tricky and stressful business. How many people should be invited? What if no one turns up? After all that preparation!

Then there’s the reluctant guest who makes excuses – the one who says, *“I’ve got to stay in to wash my hair,”* or that they’ve already got plans!

And then there’s the gate-crasher who doesn’t really belong...

Today’s Gospel speaks of God’s kingdom as a party, and the organising of it must have been about as stressful as ever.

The people who were invited just would not come... Some of them wouldn’t take it seriously, and went off to do their own thing...

...as if a person would say, *“Sorry, I can’t come to your party – I have to go to the supermarket.”*

And others seem to have been so insulted to be invited that they beat up and even murdered those who came to invite them.

What was it about this party that made it so unappealing?

A welcoming feast for all is one of Jesus’ favourite ways of speaking about the kingdom of God.

But there are a few unsettling features to this particular description...

The Lord Jesus really stresses God's righteous anger at being rejected... the host in the story is furious with those who would not come.

And as for the man who does come but wears the wrong clothes – he is cast out into the dark. So what on earth are we to make of this picture?

Jesus is warning us against being too complacent. Yes, God truly does offer us a place in his kingdom, promising to surpass our deepest longings and needs...

...to wipe away our tears and remove our guilt and our shame, as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah in today's Old Testament reading.

Yes, the Lord seeks a relationship with us... but we are still accountable for our actions.

The Lord is a loving God who invites us not simply to take our places at the banquet...

...but to actively help prepare it with him, to begin the work of building up God's kingdom in our own lives and in the community here of St Peter's... preparation!

Saint Augustine suggests that the reason the man in the story is ejected from the banquet is because the garment which he lacks is the one essential for the kingdom of heaven... love.

The wedding garment is a symbol... to enter the kingdom of God, we need to repent and have a change of heart...

And as the prophet Isaiah tells us, *"For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness..."*

Therefore, we run the risk of being left outside in the darkness because we are not clothed through the salvation that Christ offers... preparation!

We say that God is love and we might be tempted to use that fact to excuse any discipleship on our part to bring God's love to the people we meet.

But the kingdom of God is not like that. We are given opportunities to choose in our lives, and the choices we make have enormous consequences.

People often make light of the Christian faith – perhaps calling it a crutch to lean on, and that the Church is somewhere to go on a rainy Sunday morning.

In fact, for all its faults (and there are a few) the Church, as the means of communicating the Christian faith, is certainly not something to be made light of...

...for the Christian faith offers the greatest news... that we can enter into a relationship through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ... and enjoy the Lord our God for ever.

Other people oppose the Church and the faith for which it stands with a real loathing and hatred, like the people who murdered the slaves in the parable.

And others find themselves in church but not really knowing why – thinking they can be a follower of Christ without letting it penetrate their hearts and shape their lives...

...again, like the man without the wedding garment... preparation!

This parable tells us that how we respond to God's invitation is vitally important – as members of the body of Christ... the universal Church...

...and us as people who will enjoy that most wonderful, lavish party that there will ever be...

To close, let's remind ourselves of the verse that we began with, "*Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.*" **Amen.**

Matthew 22.1-14

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying:

2 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet."

5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.

7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

8 Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet."

10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe,

12 and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless.

13 Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.'