

The gospel parable today tell us an unlikely story of guests invited to a king's son's wedding banquet. Those invited had the audacity to not show up. That's about like being invited to a White House state dinner. Even if you don't like the president, it is most unlikely that you would not jump at the invitation. We can understand that the king was miffed. We might be a little surprised at how he finally filled the banquet hall, but it's a good story, none-the-less. The theme of the parable is very much like the vineyard parable that we had for the gospel reading last week. It is a theme of in-your-face rejection of the king, and in the gospel parables, the "king" is always God the Father and the "son" is Jesus, himself. Jesus told this parable as a warning to those who rejected him, because they were not only rejecting the Son of God, but God the father, too. There is an interesting add-on to this story that really needs to get our attention. One of the new guests came to the wedding improperly attired. We may say that the poor guy didn't have time to go home and get changed, but Jesus' point is this: the man proved unworthy of the invitation so the king tossed him out.

The gospel parables tell us a lot about how the early church understood God's realm and the Christian's place in God's realm. One of the great issues for Jesus, as well as the early Christians, was Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah. In our time, because we are aware of the incredible price the Jews have paid over the years and we are uncomfortable with teachings that are exclusive or condemn Judaism.

To understand these parables, though, parables known as "Parables of the Kingdom," or in other words stories about how the early church understood God's will and God's realm, you have to be aware that one of the great issues for Jesus and the early church was the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah. This was a major issue for them. In our time, because we are aware of the incredible price others have made Jews pay for this over the years, we tend to be more sympathetic; we are uncomfortable with any teaching that is exclusive or condemns Judaism. Most of us have great respect for Judaism, but the reality is that most Jews of our Lord's time did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, and neither do they today. To grow and thrive, Saint Paul and other evangelists turned to the Gentiles, or non-Jews for disciples and the Gentile church began to understand itself as the new wedding banquet "guests." Now this is factual history, and this interpretation is clearly the way that early Christians understood this parable. It reassured them of their value in God's eyes. Even so, if the parable is to have larger meaning, we have to step back and let it speak clearly to us, today.

I think we can begin by realizing that whoever the original "guests" were, whatever issues or things or people they represent in this story, we are "johnnie-on-the-spot" now. We are the new "guests" because we have accepted the invitation to discipleship conveyed by baptism. We've joined God's team; we've joined God's army. The Lord expects us to be good Christian soldiers, which means being obedient soldiers of the Cross. To follow Jesus is to obey his teachings without question, to carry out our assigned duties of loving God and neighbor. To fail to be obedient disciples is to be like the guest in the parable who did not dress for the occasion. To fail to be obedient is to be unworthy.

The gospel parables tell it like it is. There's no beating around the bush. If we are serious about our Christianity then we must live it, eat it and breathe it every hour of the day. If we are not willing, then we are unworthy and the opportunities given us will be withdrawn by the King of Kings and given to others who are more worthy. The Gospel doesn't threaten us, but it does remind us that the call to discipleship is a call to total, lifelong commitment and we are expected to give it our very best. *Amen.*