

Our parable today is seemingly straightforward: the invited guests are not impressed by the food or fashion choices of the king and refuse to come along - they are offered a feast but turn it down - maybe like us they tend to take things for granted - we are being offered an intellectual feast in the term and year ahead - do we appreciate our privilege and the luxury of time to engage our hearts and minds in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom without fear of hunger or natural disaster or war or capricious political leaders to disrupt us?

Maybe on reflection we prefer to see ourselves in the second group - the poor who look forward to what lies ahead and wanting to take our fill of what is on offer to us in the weeks and months ahead - the ones who are going to come along and thoroughly enjoy the feast.

For those of you worried about that strange reference to the man without a wedding garment - best scholarly guess is that this is a reference to critics of Matthew's community - it refers to a disdainful attitude towards the fellow guests - an exclusivist mindset that says 'this person should not be here - he's a Gentile' - the other guests are not judging their fellows but busy enjoying the king's banquet. There is plenty for everyone.

Here and now, in Chapel we are the ones who obviously have already responded to the Lord's invitation to his feast - we are from disparate places and we have come together from the streets and quads to be here to share in God's food and drink at this Eucharist and to rejoice in God's salvation - that word 'Salvation' can also be translated :

'Rescued' 'Healed' 'Made Whole' - fit for purpose - fit that is for the Kingdom of heaven.

So, here is an invitation to us all to come today and every Sunday to the Lord's feast - never to be taken for granted but cherished and enjoyed for here we find God's salvation and peace, that peace which the world cannot give. May that peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the love of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

Sermon Trinity 18

Sunday 15th October 2017

11 am Sung Eucharist Magdalen College Chapel

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

It is still early on in the University term and indeed a whole new academic year. Some of us may be old hands at this and thus not particularly excited at the prospect of the year ahead. The excitement of the new has faded for us - this is now what we are used to. Maybe we dragged ourselves here to Chapel this morning more out of a sense of duty rather than expectation. You might especially think that when you discover we are in the 'nth' Sunday after Trinity still..18th for those of you who enjoy the counting. Others though will be excited about the term to come or arrived here in anticipation of something interesting or restful or the magnificence of the music to stir our hearts and minds.

Perhaps we are a bit more like the two groups in today's parable than we might think. Both our readings today talk about feasts - not just any old feasts, special feasts prepared by God but in both readings there are obstacles to getting the guests to attend. In Isaiah God has to drive away the ruthless and flatten cities in order to rescue the poor and distressed and allow them to share his banquet of rich food and fine wines. In the Gospel reading the first group invited decide they have better things to do and those who end up at the wedding feast are those gathered in off the streets.

It is hard for us in our affluent society to understand the real impact of these feasts on the people who first heard these stories - it is a modern phenomenon to live, as we do, surrounded by so much food all the time and the threat of famine is far from us. We have so many crumbs falling from our tables we have super rats and a rat population explosion in our cities - there's just so much food wastage. In Roman society the super rich could not just invite wedding guests to share food and drink. They could also clothe their guests - the bridesmaid's dresses are the nearest equivalent in our own times - just imagine that extended to everyone invited!