



TOUCH POINT

God is a Party Animal – TouchPoint for October 7, 2020

Matthew 22:1-14

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. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again 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.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those 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, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“The slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, the good and the bad... Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness.”

When I first looked at this passage, my thoughts went in two different directions. One was to see the king as God, who invites the good and the bad to the feast. The second was to see the one who is thrown out as Jesus, who won't play by the rules of the present-day king and system. After all, being thrown out by the powers that be sounds a lot like Jesus.

And so, I wasn't clear on which way to go, because after all, “I'm not sure, but I think I'm indecisive.” But let's start with the first idea and see where it takes us.

God, apparently, is a party animal. God loves a party and no one or nothing is going to stop it.

God loves nothing more than to throw a party, a banquet, a feast. It seems to be God's favorite thing. From the preparing of a table before me in the 23rd Psalm, through the ending of the parable of the prodigal son, and then there's the feeding of the 5000; also, throw in a little extra wine at the wedding in Cana (actually, throw in A LOT of extra wine at the wedding in Cana) ... to the feast in today's parable.

And they seem to be rather extravagant parties. No cheap Chianti for drink and Nuttier Butter cookies for dessert.

No, God is a party animal. God loves nothing more than to throw a party, a banquet, a feast. And it's a special kind of feast. It's a feast of celebration. It's the feast of a wedding: a coming together, a uniting, a membering and re-membering.

And what has been united, what has come together is God and all of humanity, God and all of creation.

And who is invited, who is brought in? It is the good and the bad. It is all the people the slaves found – everyone.

The only ones who aren't there are the unworthy but unworthy doesn't seem to be the bad as opposed to the good...or the immoral as opposed to the moral. Because we know from a statement of Jesus just a few verses earlier, the tax collectors and prostitutes are getting in first.

So, what makes one unworthy and what makes one worthy? I'm not sure, but after reading all these parables recently, I think what makes one unworthy is thinking you have to be worthy. It's bringing the whole concept of 'worth' into the equation. And God will simply hear nothing of it.

Those who will not come to the party simply cannot participate in grace for whatever reason.

And those who show up but won't dress in the garment of grace...

...well God just won't let there be party poopers at his party of grace. No Debby Downers, Judge Judys, or Larry Lawyers. The rule book is thrown out at this party, and all who live by it.

And maybe this is where my second thoughts on this parable come in. Because even as one is thrown out to where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, one is thrown out to a place where Jesus has been. Jesus has been an outcast. Jesus has wept and gnashed his teeth. Jesus has been forsaken by God. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

So even in the places outside of the banquet feast. The Christ is still present.

And maybe it is on the outside, where some need to first experience grace.

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

Make no mistake about it. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom so very different from our little kingdoms.

I used to hate these stories of death and destruction when I was younger. Because, well, there seems to be so much death and destruction in them. So much weeping and gnashing of teeth. And while I don't enjoy them, I'm not as fearful of them as I used to be. I see them more as descriptive than prescriptive. Because as I get older, I realize there are a lot of things I need to die to. A lot of assumptions and beliefs and paradigms that I hold onto dearly, that get in the way of me being a gracious person. I live in a lot of systems and kingdoms and cities, as it were, that need to be destroyed.

And so, I have to ask myself. What are the kingdoms, cities, and structures of my life that are destroyed by grace? Because I think we have to understand, grace is the death of so much of our life. But it is also freeing. Grace destroys the need to prove myself right. Grace destroys the need to prove myself enough. Grace destroys the need to prove myself worthy. Because one is simply declared all of those things. Before one does or says anything.

Or to put it in the metaphor of the parable today. One is simply invited to a party of “enoughness”. You are invited because you are already enough.

And so, the destruction that is spoken about in this parable – it is the destruction of all of the meritocracy, reward and punishment systems. It is the destruction of all those things that enslave us into believing we

are not enough, and we have to do more. It is the destruction of all those who have built their kingdoms on such things. That includes social, political, and especially, RELIGIOUS systems. How many religions are built on, "You're not enough, but believe and behave like we do and you will be."

And so, the party of grace is in one way a party of destruction. But it is also a party of life, of freedom. As I've said before, we don't so much have a free will as we have a FREED will. Freed from having to make ourselves enough, or to prove ourselves worthy, we are freed to be, to live, as co-equals with all of creation and its inhabitants.

And so in a strange way, I find some hope in these parables...where I never used to.

Bishop Howie Wennes likes to tell the story of when he was a bishop and he had to fly back to Minneapolis for a sudden meeting. He called his mom who lived there and said, "I'm free on Friday, what would you like to do?" And she said, "I hear there's a good funeral going on in Decorah. I think I would like to go." And Howie went on to share, "So I went, and you know what? it was a good funeral."

Grace brings about a good funeral. It brings about the funeral of our constant struggling to be worthy. It brings about the funeral of our judgementalism towards others and their worthiness. It brings about a funeral to the whole idea of reward and punishment.

And in the place of our struggle for worthiness, in the place of judgementalism towards others, in the place of our worship of reward and punishment...

Grace holds...God holds... a wedding banquet...a wedding feast...

A feast celebrating the union of God and humanity on the basis of grace, mercy and forgiveness.....

And here is the great thing. You don't need to wait until the next life to enjoy the feast.

It's here, today. Right here and right now.

A feast celebrating the uniting of God and humanity. A feast re-membling that which had been dis-membered.

A feast of grace for the betrayers, deniers and all the rest. A feast of grace for you and me.

Or to paraphrase a pop song from the 60's, "It's God's party... and God will grace if God wants to."

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God.

Children of the Heavenly Father

Children of the heavenly Father, safely in his bosom gather. Nestling bird nor star in heaven, such a refuge e're was given. God his own doth tend and nourish, in His Holy courts they flourish. From all evil things he spares them, in His mighty arms He bears them. Neither life nor death shall ever, from the Lord, His children sever. Unto them His grace he showeth and their sorrows all he knoweth. Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne're forsaketh. His the loving purpose solely, to preserve them pure and holy.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

The Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift His countenance upon you. And give you peace...The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious unto you. The Lord be gracious, gracious unto you. Amen