



Outer Darkness, Inner Light – Touchpoint for October 10, 2023

Matthew 22:1-14 (NIV) The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

¹Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and 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 wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Remember that old Burger King commercial that said, “Have it your way”? They didn’t really mean it, did they? They were just creating an illusion that we could have it our way. I dare you to go ask them for an upgrade with a Blue Moon as the drink!

What arose when reading this passage were the words, ‘outer darkness.’ Outer and utter sound so similar, but utter connotes an absolute, while outer refers to external. What does it mean to be cast out into outer darkness? If there's an outer darkness, is there an inner darkness? I thought about the inner and outer light. We are called to be a light to the world. Perhaps this light originates from the home of the heart always inviting us to return from the external outer darkness. Even the world knows the value of the inner light.

The dictionary describes inner light this way:

“The presence and inner working of God in the soul acting as a guiding spirit that is superior even to Scripture and unites humankind to Christ.”

A second reference states:

“The inner light reflects ourselves.”

When our children go out at night and come home at night what do we do? We leave a light on in the house so they can see where they're going. We leave a welcoming light on. Usually, an outside light and an insight light. We wouldn't turn all the lights off unless we've really got a bone to pick!

The outer darkness can dominate and nearly extinguish our inner light.

The Kingdom of the world is not a great mystery. Our daily lives and obligations are part of the kingdom of the world. When the ego takes over, we fall prey to outer darkness. Our unwillingness deprives us of full participation at the banquet called Kingdom of Heaven or 'the inner life.' The Kingdom of Heaven is when something greater inside of us is guiding, and we let go of all ego.

God allows us to go our own way. Control our outer world. But it always leads to individualism. A way that seems right but unguided by the inner light.

God will let you have it your way.

Having a preferred way of living sounds like a good idea. This chosen way of life abandons mystery and resists guidance. Choosing certitude fashions a golden statue to our ambitions, leaving us in the shadows of their creation. We become darkened to our guiding inner light, the light that unites us with the universal Christ.

There was a prison Chaplain assigned to those serving life terms. Every day he would wait as the guards ushered the inmates into the cold empty room. After a year of services, the Chaplain prayed, "God, how can I bring hope where there is none? Guide me through this darkness." He decided at the next chapel service to acknowledge the hopelessness they experience. Walking into the empty room, he set a box on the table. They shuffled in with redundant strides. Once the inmates sat in silent courtesy, the Chaplain said, "Were going to do something a little different today. We're going to light a candle." One man shouted, "You can't do that! We can't have paraphernalia." The Chaplain responded, "Were going to do it anyway."

In sacred silence the Chaplain reached into the box and placed the imaginary candle on the table. Patting his pockets, the Chaplain searched for his imaginary lighter. From the back of the room a voice shouted, "Here you go!" tossing an imaginary lighter to the Chaplain. Catching it, the Chaplain said, "Thank you." Lighting the candle, he warmed his hands over the flame and said, "Observe the flickering flame, imagine its glow and warmth." The room was silent. The mood in the air was different than other services. The Chaplain concluded the service and began to blow out the candle. A shout was heard from the same man who gave him a light. "STOP! Don't do that!" the man said. Surprised, the Chaplain said, "What?" The man responded, "Don't blow out the candle. It's the first time I've seen light in this place. Every time I come in this room; I want to know it's burning."

In looking at the parable of the wedding banquet, the guest wanted to wear what he wanted to wear. The guest did not wear the customary robe worn to honor the couple. Perhaps this signifies an unwillingness to participate in the celebration. The guest was doing things his way. Scripture teaches us that we should not try to create our own light in the darkness. We need to depend upon the inner light. Our ego prefers doing things our way. Losing our inner light is allowing ourselves to be defined by all the perceived pressures and demands that come from our outer world. I may have liabilities, but I am not a liability. There may be church customs, but they are not laws that get to provide access to the spiritual life.

In the case of the wedding celebration, wearing a robe was not a rule. It was a custom, and it was not about the attendees. The customs were about the wedding couple's sacred moment and celebration. To wear a robe was not an order, it was an invitation into the Divine Experience and a willingness to be completely present to

someone else's experience. Not wearing a robe could express a person's desire (heart) to be only a spectator. Being an outwardly, unwilling participant in response to an invitation seems even more unfortunate.

Is God's glorious invitation to the inner light that guides us through darkness unfair? Must our self-determined, nearsighted ego continue to deprive of us of living the adventurous life of uncertainty? A life filled with surprise and wonder? Do I live like this? Please don't answer that lest you participate in my invitation to judge.

We are all God's children invited to be guided by our inner light that unites us all in Christ... a full-on participant in the successes and sufferings of others. Let us put on the robe of belonging and celebrate without discrimination when others unite. Let us not place uniqueness above solidarity. May we not be cast into the outer darkness... the darkness of our self-determined way where legal problems, financial woes, health problems and self-proclaimed authorities join with ego, dimming our inner light.

Outer light illumines what we see. Inner light illumines what we can't see. When our outer world brings us to our knees in darkness, we must attempt to create our own light. Like the man serving a life term, we must depend on the inextinguishable light.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)
Be still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

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 the Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugan, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear.

Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear.

For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

- 1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace. *Refrain*
- 2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*
- 3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you,
The guarding of loving Christ be on you,
The guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you,
to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ,
The guarding of the Spirit be upon you.