



3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY IN LENT  
MARCH 7/8, 2015

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MATTHEW 22:1-14

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* is the title of a movie from 1967. It tells the story of the engagement announcement between (I'll be using the **color** spectrum now) a **white** woman and a **black** man. Here's a little historical tidbit – until June of 1967, interracial marriage was still illegal in 17 states!! That's almost impossible for me to believe...and yet, that's my generation!

Anyway, this Academy-award winning film tells the story of a young woman who brings her whirlwind-romance-fiance home to meet **her** parents... and **her** to meet **his** parents as **well**. It is a poignant parable of how we operate with specific sets of expectations – from family values to workplace ethics to societal norms.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells the story of a king whose son is getting married. We never hear from the bride and groom about their expectations – as you heard, this story is about the king's expectations.

Now, **any** wedding is a big deal to the couple getting married. And a **V.I.P.** wedding is **very** interesting to a **lot** of people. But the wedding of **royalty** – especially the royalty of our cousins across the pond – is always a **VERY** big deal...to people throughout the world.

Some of you remember a little marriage celebration that took place four years ago – Kate and Prince William, the future king of England... I'm sure that none of **you** did this, but a friend of ours in Anchorage actually took a **vacation** day from **work** so she could **watch** the festivities **around the clock**...I **kid** you **not!!!**

There is **NOTHING** in the **world** that would have stopped our friend from **attending** that royal wedding had she been blessed to receive an invitation... **And**, she would have thought that **anyone** who refused such an invitation would be **completely** off their **rocker**!

That's the milieu, the context, the environment in which Jesus tells his story. And most of those hearing his parable would never be on the A, or B or even C list of

invitees to a royal wedding. They, like you and me, would be C-L-U-E-L-E-S-S about how to even respond, let alone know what to do about it... To say the least, nothing in the world would have stopped any of them from feasting at the Prince's marriage banquet.

So what's going on in Jesus' parable?

Many of you have seen the Disney movie, The Lion King. When, Simba, the king's son is presented to the animal kingdom – it is a *huge* celebration. **Everyone** is excited to attend the festivities – **all** except for his uncle Skar who's **jealous** since Simba's birth moves him **further** away from the throne. His **absence** is **noted** and it **gets** him in **trouble**.

Jesus ratchets up the tension even more in his story by saying that the slaves who were sent to deliver the invitations are beaten and even killed. This bad behavior is noted and it gets those people in trouble. To reject the king's messengers could be seen as an act of war, which is exactly how the king responds. The murderers are themselves put to death and their city burned.

Then, when that *unpleasantness* has been dealt with, the king moves to the B and C lists. He is bound and determined to have a huge party for his son, and refuses to let anything, even a bloody rebellion by the elite of his country, ruin it. So he sends more slaves out into the highways and byways inviting anyone and everyone to the feast – the good and even the bad in order to fill that wedding hall with guests.

Then, just when the party starts to percolate, another wrench gets thrown into the works. One man refuses to wear the robe that's required. **Everyone** else – the good and the bad – have put on their *Sunday best*. But not **this** guy...Did he **not** have time to run home? Did he **lose** it? We don't get to know **why** he's robe-less, because he doesn't speak, not even when directly addressed by the king!

So what's going on here? This image of an irate king in the kingdom of heaven doesn't fit our usual kindly-grandfather picture of God, does it? This is more like one of those *end-of-the-world* bumper stickers that read: ***God is coming soon – and boy is he mad*** (or words to that **effect!**).

Yet, as **uncomfortable** as this image of God may make us **feel**, I don't think we can **dismiss** it – or **explain** it **away**. The king's **anger** at the wealthy rebels, **and** at the uncooperative guest, is a **deliberate** part of Jesus' story. And I think its

**significance** is clear: God's *anger at, wrath toward, hatred of sin* (everything that separates us from God) is part of what Luther calls God's dark side that we can never know and only fear.

C.S. Lewis captures this notion of God in a great description from one of his Chronicles of Narnia books. Narnia is a magical land in which animals talk with people and adventure is the order of the day. As in our world, the Narnians are also caught in a struggle between good and evil.

The White Witch is the wintery enemy of God (known as the Emperor-over-the-Sea), while the Emperor's son is a magnificent **lion** named **Aslan**. In the book entitled, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, four children find their way into Narnia from this world, and eventually prepare to meet this kingly beast. Talking with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about what Aslan is like, little Lucy, the youngest of the group, timidly asks, *Is he safe? Safe?!?* snorts Mrs. Beaver. He's a **lion**! Of **course** he isn't safe...but he is good!

When you get right down to it, there is precious little in Scripture that describes God as safe. Nowhere is God pictured as a clawless pussy cat. And often we can imagine God roaring like a lion at those who sin, who reject God's love, who hurt others or fail to care for those in need. As we see in the story for today, the king is keenly concerned about blessing us, passionately purposeful in protecting us, and completely convicted about caring for us. In short, this parable is a warning that we dare not ignore the King of Heaven.

That's the dark side of God in this parable. **What's the bright side?**

Look at the king's insistence on getting out the **invitation**. **3** times he sends his slaves out to make sure that **everyone** has heard the good news of the coming banquet. He wants **EVERYONE** there – and will let nothing ruin his plan to throw a party. He doesn't even care if they've been identified as **good or bad people** – he must be pretty confident that he will win everyone over.

Says theologian Robert Capon, *(The King) doesn't care a fig that (the people) look like pigs and smell worse. He doesn't care that they don't know hors d'oeuvres from Havana cigars. He doesn't care that they eat with their hands and blow their noses without handkerchiefs. In other words...they do not have to get their act together in order to be worthy of the party...* (Kingdom, Grace, Judgment, p. 461).

The good news here is that the invitation to come to the banquet is based not on who we could-or-should be...but on who the **Son** is. For it is **his gown** that we have been given to wear. Says the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3: *As many of you as were **baptized** into Christ have **clothed** yourselves **with Christ*** (v. 27).

We who find ourselves at the feast are blessed beyond belief. For when the king looks at us – in the robe that he has provided – he could see us as we are: simple servile citizens dressed in dingy rags that reek. Instead, he peers into the depths of our hearts and sees his Son in you, and his Son in me.

*The only ones, says Capon, who will not enjoy the Marriage Feast of the Lamb are those who, in the very thick of the festivities, refuse to believe that they are at (the banquet) (p. 462).*

In the face of the King's unimaginable generosity and passionate pursuit to people his party, the man who chose not to wear a robe has no excuse. He remains silent. I'm thinking that if he would have said anything, if in any way he would have acknowledged the king's presence, the Master would have found him a robe and the party would go on with him.

But here we have the mystery that will boggle our minds until we find ourselves standing before the king. Though the overwhelming majority of folks who get it about God will be feasting at the banquet table, there will be a some who see the party and refuse to participate.

The great thing is that you and I don't have to **worry** about them... that's above our pay grade, right? We should pray for them and trust that God's Spirit will be knocking on the doors of their hearts every day of their lives. But our job, as servants of the Lord, is to get out into the world and issue the invitation to everyone – both good and bad – to come and taste and see that God is very good.

So when you leave here, when you enter the arena of life, when you go to work, to school, to the store, take a good look around and...*Guess who's coming to dinner...* On second thought, with the generous way that the King sends out invitations, it might be much easier to guess... who's **not** coming to dinner.

Amen.