

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 11th October 2020 – Trinity 18

Isaiah 25.1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4.1-9; Matthew 22.1-14

Jesus' favourite image for heaven is a party; a grand banquet in which all sorts of unexpected people are welcome and included. It seems that Jesus was something of a party animal. But Jesus' parties are a bit different. Some people, who think that his parties would be very much for them, find themselves feeling curiously uncomfortable about them. And others, who never expected to be invited to a party by Jesus, find themselves included.

The parable of the Wedding Banquet is actually some hard hitting teaching from Jesus. Its basic message is a question, "Are you ready for the party that Jesus calls, 'The Kingdom of God', or the 'Kingdom of Heaven'?" In the parable a whole lot of people, not only couldn't be bothered but they really didn't want to go, to the extent that they abused the king's messengers and killed most of them. It was a pretty extreme negative reaction. No wonder the king was so angry with them!

Then also there was the man who turned up in the wrong clothes and was thrown out. People often find this last part of the parable a bit difficult to understand, as it seems so unkind and seems to run counter to the earlier part where all sorts of people are gathered in. Of course they don't have the right clothes! However the background is that at a rich family's wedding, the guests would be GIVEN robes to wear.

The wrong clothes are in fact a metaphor for someone who is determined not to get into the true spirit of the party. This man didn't want to wear the clothes he had been given; he didn't want to get into the party mood, which is why he had no explanation. Just as much as those who didn't want to come in the first place, he was in fact excluding himself.

All this makes even more sense when you also realise that when teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven, it is not just about what happens after people die. The Kingdom of Heaven is about transformation in this life too. Christians are called to begin living in the Kingdom of Heaven in the here and now. We are called to get in to the heavenly party mood in this life, to wear the clothes as it were, today and every day. Doing this is life changing. It is a world changing thing to do. We are being invited to God's party, here and now.

So the question remains, are we, are you, am I, ready for God's party. Are we ready to get into the heavenly mood, now in this life? Are we ready to wear the clothes, now, in this life? It all depends of course on the party. What is the real nature of the party to which Jesus is calling us?

Maybe however, you are finding all this talk of parties at present to be a bit sick! Parties are definitely a big problem at present. The Rule of Six is a bit of a downer, and people who are having parties anyway are endangering the rest of us. And there are lots of people who would love to party and are deeply depressed that they can't. Parties are about social interaction; social interaction is a deeply integral part of being human; and social interaction

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

is being severely limited because of the pandemic. So parties at present, are very much a sore point

However, the party that is the Kingdom of Heaven is able to transcend this. THIS party is indeed fundamentally about social interaction and social relations, but it is essentially a party that is enabled by the Holy Spirit of God. It is a party of generosity and compassion. It is a party of inclusion and healing. It is a party of joy and reconciliation. And it is of the nature of THIS party that it knows no bounds of space and time. All these things can still happen, even if they need more effort and intention in the current situation, because the Holy Spirit continues to be at work.

So the question really becomes, how are we going to continue being part of THIS party, wearing the right clothes for this party, in the current situation? It's why we are all here this morning, taking part either here in church or online, bound together by the Holy Spirit over space and time. Because one way or another, we are indeed responding to the call of Jesus to come to his Father's party. You may only be dimly aware of this; you may not know clearly why you want to be there; but you do nevertheless feel invited. You ARE invited.

A key thing about this part is that we don't have to get ourselves ready, indeed we can't really. It is God himself who calls us, prepares us, clothes us and feeds us and strengthens us; so that we are fit to join his party, the party of the Kingdom of Heaven. All we need to do is to be ready to respond to the prompting of his Spirit. Our part is simply to be willing to get in the mood, even if we don't much feel like it at first. It is the Holy Spirit who is inviting us, and our eternal life depends on it. Amen.

CJ. 11.10.20