

#46 10-11

Exodus 32:1-14

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

Dressing for the Blessing

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.”

The lectionary scriptures for today got me feeling a like Sherlock Holmes! It all started out earlier in the week when I realized that Yom Kippur was coming up - and it was yesterday - and I realized I didn't know what it really was. So I did some research (once again, thank you Wikipedia) and discovered that it is also known as “Day of Atonement, and is the holiest and most solemn day of the year for the Jews. Traditionally, Yom Kippur is considered the date on which Moses received the second set of Ten Commandments. It occurred following the completion of the second 40 days of instructions from God. At this same time, the Israelites were granted atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf; hence, its designation as the Day of Atonement.” And we shared this experience in our Old Testament lesson for today!

“[Yom Kippur's] central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services. Yom Kippur completes the annual period known in Judaism as the High Holy Days or Yamim Nora'im ('Days of Awe').

“According to Jewish tradition, God inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into a book, the Book of Life, on Rosh Hashanah, and waits until Yom Kippur to "seal" the verdict. During the Days of Awe, a Jew tries to amend his or her behavior and seek forgiveness for wrongs done against and against other human beings. The evening and day of Yom Kippur are set aside for public and private petitions and confessions of guilt (Vidui). At the end of Yom Kippur, one considers oneself absolved by God.”

Believe it or not – the Gospel lesson for today is also reflective of these same themes.

For most, *perhaps*, this sounds like such a harsh and cruel King – and to equate this King with our image of God seems like God is a bully masochist! In my human point of view, if I threw a party and no one came, it would break my heart – but not this guy! His confidence, his sense of self and of justice - and his love for his son was so profound this King did not let himself be affected by the rejection of others. I guess that is what makes him a King!

And this is actually a story about God and the relationship God has with God's people. Comparing this text to Yom Kippur, and to the covenant God had with the Israelites, might show this text in a different light.

God showed his love and providence for the Israelites by freeing them from slavery, giving them food and drink, keeping them safe and alive – and as soon as Moses turns his back for a few moments they go worshipping another God! A strong shiny God made of earthen Gold – not like the ethereal God who Moses represented! This moment in Jewish history became the foundation of a holy day of penance, reminding the chosen people that they had a certain responsibility to God, and it wasn't always all about them.

And that is what our Gospel is about. God called certain special people to celebrate Jesus' time here on earth – and they did not come – and were even cruel and violent to those who proclaimed his holiness. So God opened the relationship up to all people. Now, all of humanity has been chosen by God to come into covenant. And yet, even though God's covenant – God's grace is freely given – there is an obligation that we have to God as part of this relationship.

Moses begged God not to destroy the Israelites as a result of their lack of respect and appreciation for the grace and covenant they received, as a result they were given another chance, from this experience the Jewish tradition of this holiest of holy days has come about. Appreciation and respect in return for the awesomeness of God is seen to be the correct reaction.

So at the King's wedding feast we have an open invitation – and yet, there is still a responsibility that all guests have to their host. And that is what this Gospel lesson is about. It is about appreciating the relationship offered by God. And in human reality, it just works naturally. When we are aware enough of the gifts of life and love we naturally are in awe and thankful. And we realize what a delicate balance it is to maintain this sense of wonder.

On the other side of the coin – when we try to live outside of a covenant relationship with the mystical, we cut ourselves off from the source of inspiration, joy, love and grace and we find ourselves “[in] the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The wedding feast is the covenant relationship with God. The covenant relationship with God is the human attempt to stay in touch with that which is spiritual and holy in this world. And we are often too busy with banal things, as we noticed from the text when we discovered the reason those invited weren't coming, “5But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.” Making light of the vitally important spiritual relationship creates a disunity of the soul and a wavering - lost in the darkness - un-compassed voyage where one gnashes ones' teeth!

There is nothing more terrifying for me than the idea that *I* am the greatest power I will be able to relying on in my life. It is the covenant with God, and my trust of humanity, which is based on that love and grace of God, that takes my mind and my imagination – my dreams and knowledge – my creativity and my joy to wondrous places full of hope. Left alone to my own weak human self I quickly face the limits of life.

Theologian, William H. Shannon, wrote about Thomas Merton's book, *Dark Path*, which describes this state of being with and without the covenant of God. He wrote, “When Merton speaks of sin, he has in mind, not primarily a moral lapse whereby I choose what is in conflict with my better instincts, but an ontological lapse whereby I choose what is in conflict with my true being. It is not simply that I make mistakes. I become a mistake. For I become what I am not.

But the mistake can be overcome, I can choose to drop the mask, the illusion, of my false self and achieve my true identity in God. Indeed, from the moment I become capable of conscious acts of love, “[my] life becomes a series of choices between the fiction of [my] false self whom [I] feed with the illusion of passion and selfish appetite and [my] true identity in the peace of God.”

So, we in the Disciples tradition don't often speak of repentance, we don't use a Confession of Sin or a credal recitation of faith, and yet we have here a striking moment in the words of our Lord, warning us to take a moment and consider how we are spiritually dressed. What are we invited to do and to become through the grace of God and in covenant with this church? Are we gnashing our teeth and shivering in the coldness of expectations left undone? How much time in each day do we spend reflecting on our relationship with God and others?

If upon reflection we find that we are lacking, let us find our way back to that covenant – and one way to do this is to remember Paul's words to the Philippians that we heard earlier . . . “8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.