

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Chosen

July 31, 2011

Psalm 17 and Matthew 22:11-14
(Hymns – 420, 642, 644, 661)

Our text from Matthew this morning
is an interesting little add on
to Matthew's version of the parable of the Great Feast
we read from Luke last week.

Matthew makes it a wedding feast for a king's son,
emphasizing the beginning of a new relationship
between God and humanity
inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

There are details in the Matthean version of the feast parable
that point more explicitly to the clash between
the emerging Christian churches and the Jewish synagogues
that dominated Matthew's context and mindset.

The four verses that we read this morning
are unique to Matthew's account.

They tell the story of a particular guest,
A man without wedding clothing.

The king addresses him as "Friend."

He wonders how he managed to get in without wedding clothing.

The man says nothing.

Then the king tells his servants to throw him out into the dark,
where he will cry and grind his teeth.

Jesus' comment on the story is this –
many are called, few are chosen.

On the surface, this is another
of Matthew's characteristic stories of judgement.

They occur much more frequently in Matthew
than in any of the other Gospels.

For Matthew, there is a great urgency to make a decision.

He constantly confronts his readers
with the gravity of the choices laid before them –
loyalty to Jesus, the Messiah and the Christ, and his kingdom
or suffering in alienation from God.

Most commentators treat this passage
as yet another of those urgent warnings to decide.
And it is.

But I think there may be more to this story,
another level of insight that is worth exploring.

Here's the phrase that struck me this week
as I prepared this sermon.

But the man said nothing. (12b)

I don't think this is a story about the clothes the man was wearing,
but about the silence,
the lack of response,
from the invited guest.

The man said nothing.

The king had addressed him as *Friend*.
Now, in Matthew, *Friend* is almost a curse word.
It is used with heavy sarcasm, with a sneer.
So the king is upset.

In my imagination, that upset
is focused on this guest's lack respect and preparation.
He has been invited to the wedding of the king's son.
The other last minute invitees
would appear to have at least put on a clean tunic
prior to coming to the feast.
This man shows up in his grubby street clothes.

So it's the attitude beneath the clothes that matters here,
the lack of respect and preparation.
There would appear to be a lack of appreciation
for the significance of this invitation,
a lack of gratitude for the gift being offered in this feast.
This is the king.
This is the wedding feast of his son.
This is an unexpected and delightful invitation to dine in delight.

And when challenged on this,
the guest is silent.
That's even worse than the lack of respect and preparation.

There is no recognition of the insult to the occasion.
There is no explanation of the inappropriate behaviour.

There is no contrition or sense of remorse.
There is no resolve to make amends.
There is no confession.
There is nothing – just silence.

In choosing silence, the guest chooses the consequences.
Because of his silence, he is ejected from the feast.

And what about our silence
in response to God's invitation in Christ to come to the feast of the kingdom?

Are we as fully aware as we can be
of the great gift we are being offered
in God's invitation through Christ to come to feast in the kingdom?
Do we hear it, feel it, see it
in every moment of our lives,
in every breath that we take?

Because it is there – in every moment of every day.
It is the invitation to be in Christ with every breath that we take.

I know I am silent far too often in the face of this gracious invitation.

But I also know where I can` come
to find support in breaking my silence,
to find reminders of how generations of faithful followers
have flourished in the grace of Jesus Christ.

That where is here,
in a community of worship and learning, of fellowship, and of service,
where together we listen for Christ's invitation
and choose to speak in response.

We speak in words, in actions, and in attitudes.
Refusal to respond – silence – leaves us in the dark,
crying and grinding our teeth in misery.

God has made his choice.
The invitation is extended in Jesus Christ.

Now we must make ours.