

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 15 October 2023  
Reverend Martin Johnson

*Isaiah 25.1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4.1-9; Matthew 22:1-14*

Have you received I wonder a 'Save the Date' note via email or perhaps even as a fridge magnet. Many couples send these out to get their family and friends to get their wedding date in their diaries, before the formal invitations are sent. I thought this was a modern idea, but indeed it is an idea from the first century that has been revived – not the fridge magnet! First century weddings were elaborate affairs, they involved the entire community and like modern weddings there would have been a great deal of preparation including a 'save a date.' Eventually on the day of the wedding the village would be told to gather with the happy couple, they would have already got their Sunday best from the dry cleaners!

That's the everyday context, the theological context was put to us this morning by Isaiah: On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet. the best of meats the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. This is the wedding feast of the lamb, which we prefigure here in the Eucharist. There's a wonderful Latin Easter hymn: At the Lamb's high feast we sing, praise to our victorious King! Not in our hymn book unfortunately!

We experience one such wedding feast in today's gospel passage, another of the parables of Jesus in this portion of Matthew's gospel. Once more we are told Jesus spoke to them in parables and once again this is demanding stuff, we cannot escape the sense of judgement that pervades this parable. But we need to be cautious, the idea of parable telling is not simply to answer the question, what is the Kingdom of God like...? but to lead the listeners into more questions, the primary one being: who am I in this parable, what do I look like in light of the kingdom, these are questions that rarely have clear cut answers. Think of the parable of the two sons – which one are you? Jesus is wanting us to judge ourselves, it should remind us of James' epistle and the call to look in the mirror...what do you see? Judgement is self-imposed; Jesus does not directly judge the pharisees or the chief priests or any of other religious sects. 'They realised that he was speaking about them,' it says in the gospel.

It is lazy to read this and other parables and adopt an approach in which we identify the players and their roles. This is not a script for a play. But this is something that we do all too readily, we are quite comfortable with putting folk into, nice tidy, labelled boxes, we need to beware, this is not the way of the parable because it is not the way of God. We should be alert to this problem and read our parables carefully,) few of us inhabit one particular box, few, if any of us have one role.

We should be careful too of thinking that for the poorly attired wedding guest that is the end of the story. To do so would be to fail to appreciate the place of the cross in our tradition. We have from time-to-time commemorated Good Friday here at St Philip's with versions of Stations of Cross. Station number 10 in the traditional version: Jesus is stripped of his garments. There is a sense that we will all be found inappropriately attired on occasions, perhaps we might sense the judgement of others, importantly we might judge ourselves for our lack of faith, lack of care, for our own judgement of others. On Good Friday we recall that Jesus is stripped of his wedding garment and thrown into the outer darkness, that place of weeping and gnashing of teeth: for us and for our salvation, so we say in the creed.

It is worth noting the fact that the man without a tie is greeted as friend. The same way that Jesus addressed Judas in the garden of Gethsemane. The one who had enjoyed the hospitality of the Last Supper and went on to betray his host.

What of us? Well, before we approach the feast of the Eucharistic banquet we get metaphorically dressed up. You could say that we are naked, empty handed before God. But we confess our faults, we offer each other God's peace and we come forward offering ourselves our souls and bodies in the eucharistic elements. We are clothed in so doing and we partake of the

feast. Yes, there is offering, something is required of us. What is this garment then, is it our faith or the things we do. The great reformer Calvin claimed that this was a useless argument, they cannot be separated. He wrote: Christ intended only to state that the Lord calls us on the express condition of our being renewed by the Spirit.

Today's Second Reading is traditionally associated with Advent because of its words about the nearness of the Lord. In the old Prayer Book it is the Epistle for the Fourth Sunday of Advent. But it is also, I think, a picture of what we look like properly attired.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you.

Joy, gentleness, prayer, gratitude, a mindset only on what is good, and a determination always to see the best in any person or situation: these are the marks, the warp and weft of the garment God offers us. What can we do to make them the marks of our own lives, and so be made worthy to come to his banquet? Amen.