

The Kingdom of God Is Like....

Sometimes the lessons are really sweet and comforting, as in "come to me all you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest....," and "blessed are the poor and meek and those who mourn..."

These readings are like a fluffy pillow, comfortable and soothing.

And then there's readings which are a lot like a two by four aimed right between our eyes!

And I know many folks wonder, why can't God always have a gentle word for us?

Why these two by fours??????

Well, my guess is that sometimes that's what it takes to get our attention, particularly when it comes to the nitty gritty of our often stubborn, self-obsessed human nature - like a pus filled infection, some lancing is needed before the healing can begin.

Let's start with the parable.

It starts out with everyone being invited to a wedding feast; only to have most folks beg off for a million and one reasons, resulting in disaster for those who beg off; then leading to a whole new invitation, made to the social nobodies, the drunks and invalids, the addicts, whores and miscreants.

But even then there's the guy with no tuxedo!

He's thrown out on his ear!

So what the heck is Jesus talking about?

Maybe he's getting at what the first reading is getting at.

Let's spend just a moment with these ancient Israelites...since Jesus seems to be making the same point in our gospel lesson.

There's poor Moses commiserating with God high in the mountains when the people suddenly get amnesia!

Moses?

Who's Moses?

Moses has been gone a while, so suddenly the "what have you done for me lately" mentality sets in and they do something quite dramatic, yet quite predictable too.

Remember, they have been called out of slavery into a life of freedom — based on trust in God.

They had nothing, they left with very little, yet through their response to freedom's call, and by trusting God, this band of nitwits witnesses the destruction of the world's most powerful army!

But freedom and trust are among the most difficult things for human beings to abide by.

The expiration date comes faster than week old milk.

So they do what humanity has done since the dawn of time; they opt for **our way** as opposed to **God's way**.

Removing the glasses of freedom and trust, they put on the glasses of human control.

And why is the golden calf the perfect symbol of this?

Because it's made out of their wedding rings and tooth fillings and money: all symbols of human power and control and invention.

Meaning that freedom and trust are quickly exchanged for slavery to things we make; and we worship these things, and the consequence of that worship is always disaster, not because God is mean – but because it violates our fundamental nature.

We are made in the image and likeness of God!

We are made to be God's co-creators; and we debase our high calling when we fall down in worship before the very things that exist to serve us – like money and sex and civil society.

Even Christianity can become an idol opposed to the life of faith and trust to which we are called.

When folks say Christianity supports the annihilation of another country, as the Rev Jeffers did last month; or that Christianity is all about loving family and friends; or that Christians can reject refugees and immigrants, well, that's when Jesus reaches for the two by four!

Christianity is all about love the love of our enemies.

It's all about caring but for those whom society rejects.

It's all about welcoming ... but of those seen as invaders or the undeserving.

When Jesus invites us to think of the kingdom of God in the light of today's parable, perhaps what he's asking us to see is that our first reaction to this strange kingdom is to find any excuse possible to say "no thanks!"

"Freedom and trust," as offered to the Israelites, as offered to us, is a harsh and dreadful thing.

It means rejecting military solutions to conflicts between our fellow human beings.

It means my money is not my money – it belongs to the gal who can't pay her electric bill this month.

It means unlearning everything I thought I knew about being human, an unlearning we know by the terms Metanoia, which means repent, which means turn around, which means change my mind.

No wonder "many are called but few are chosen."

It's far easier to place our faith in the military or the economy or the celebrity – but the result of such misplaced faith is always death.

And what about the fellow who shows up in jeans and a tee shirt.

No tuxedo.

He's promptly booted out of the fun.

At first, this seems incredibly cruel.

Who keeps a tux nearby just in case you get a last minute wedding invitation?

Why is he in such hot water?

Because the missing wedding garment is not about a tuxedo; the missing wedding garment is a symbol for living the life of our faith.

We know this because scripture is full of clothing being a stand-in for a life based on faith and trust.

St Paul encourages the Galatians to put on the baptismal garment of Christ.

He implores the Colossians to clothe themselves in compassion, kindness, mercy and patience.

And then there's the prophet Isaiah, who speaks of God clothing Israel with righteousness; while St Peter encourages his small community to be clothed in humility.

The reason this guy in blue jeans is in hot water isn't because he left his tux at home.

He's in trouble because rather than acting like an honored guest, rather than experiencing a sense of awe at the sheer mercy of a host who rounds up every last child, woman and man, deserving and undeserving; rather than having a sense of quiet gratitude, our friend bellies up to the bar and stuffs his face with the shrimp cocktail; gulps down the spiked punch, and wipes his hands on his stained blue jeans: totally stuck in self-absorbed satisfaction. Capon, Parables of Judgment and Grace, 455.

He apparently sees no difference between "All You Can Eat Night" at Chili's and the wedding feast for the King's son.

Let's bring it closer to home.

The guy with no wedding garment is the same guy who comes to church each Sunday, but who brings along, almost defiantly, the world's values of competition, of anger, of ego and pride; who sits in the church pew, who takes the bread and the cup, and yet rejects everything that Jesus stands for, everything that Jesus died to show us.

That's why this fellow is in trouble.

He rejects his baptismal clothing of kindness, meekness, humility, compassion; insisting on the jeans and tee shirt of ego-driven self-righteousness.

So absorbed is this fellow in himself that when the king confronts him, he is dumbfounded, he is speechless.

The terribly uncomfortable cannon ball that Jesus launches at us today is not complicated; but it is also not easy to hear.

Written on that cannon ball is this message: "faith that fails to change us is no faith at all."

Our faith, if it is alive, will change us; and change we must if we wish to wear the wedding garment of the kingdom of God.

It is a garment sewn not by hands, but by the heart.

We cannot make these changes alone.

So we gather here each week, the bad and the good, to wash ourselves yet again, to put on once again our baptismal clothing; and against all odds and against pressure from every quarter, we recommit ourselves to the practice of "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable."

From these come the wedding garments suitable for a guest of the King.

+amen

