

# 19th Sunday after Pentecost

08.10.2017  
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## Introduction

The metaphorical meaning of the wedding banquet in this parable is salvation. Jesus makes this clear in his contrast between being at the feast, within the kingdom, and being cast into outer darkness. It is a story about God's anger with human entitlement, the human desire to feel 'deserving' rather than blessed, and about the generosity of true salvation by God's grace.

It is hard to read the text for this coming Sunday, however, without thinking of real weddings in the time of COVID-19 and all the disruption, conflict, hope and frustration around the desire to celebrate while keeping our closest friends and family safe from disease. We could easily reframe this story as 'The Parable of the Cancelled Wedding'.

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## Text

### Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again 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.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then 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.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

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## Comment

The King was enraged.

For how many of us has this COVID-19 pandemic in one way or another not brought a frustrated plan, a cancelled event, a change of work, circumstance or even if not to us, has brought one of these calamities to someone we love? Are we in touch with feelings of rage or anger? Have we found we judge others more harshly? Social media has been full of anger and rage. We have in this year political upheaval, the pandemic itself, and the ongoing climate crisis which may yet engulf all these miseries with other greater evils in food shortages, destruction of homes and lives, and permanent changes to our landscapes, biodiversity, and weather systems.

These entitled diners, the guests who were too busy, could be read as those who close their eyes to the seriousness of the trouble to be brought upon their neighbours, and themselves. The top 1% of people in the world, ranked by wealth, use as much CO<sub>2</sub> as the poorest 50% altogether. Yet they have this feeling of entitlement to their share of the world's resources even though it is patently clear that the whole planet cannot afford to have them live that way.

The King was enraged.

For many of us, trying to work our way through the practicalities of living through a pandemic is enough. I have this very strong memory of going to a supermarket in a local town on the 23rd or so of March and every shelf was empty. I remember the feeling of panic rising. All my training as a 'non-anxious' presence vanished as I felt this urge to feed my family, to have food to take home and there was none. It wasn't voluntary or controllable. Everyone looked panicked, everyone seemed anxious. For the society of Jesus day, the people lived in far more direct contact with their food. There were not freezers or fridges, it would have taken a year to plan, raise, feed and cull the additional animals needed for a wedding feast. If the entitled people weren't going to come and eat it, someone had to. Hungry people, who did not have enough food, were a reality and were, in Jesus' words 'both good and bad'. Round my bit, the local hotels mostly reliant on American tourism and golf tourism, donated masses of food to the food bank in March 2020. When I went in with donations from returning students they didn't actually need what I had to offer. Good things do come out of crises.

The King was enraged.

The various governments around the world have come up with different rules or guidance of social control to control the spread of COVID-19 and different countries have had more or less success keeping their citizens safe. One of the theories I learned about during my time volunteering for the NHS in chaplaincy, was the idea of 'moral injury' which is when people are asked to undertake tasks by those in government or authority for which they are underprepared or in which they see harm. The nurse working shift after shift without proper PPE, the social worker reduced to telephone calls so that they can't tell how well their clients are really doing, the carer of a dementia or psychosis sufferer lost without their day care and having to watch a deterioration which might have been avoidable. In this story, a guest comes without a wedding robe – like turning up to catch a bus without a face covering, their lack of respect endangers everyone, refusing to accept the social rules of wedding attendance lost them their place at the table. The feast is open, generous, more than fair, but we can't demand it without considering the feelings, livelihoods, essence of others, that isn't how heaven works.

The King was enraged: write down everything, political, personal, social, communal which angers you about the COVID-19 pandemic. Think of cancelled events, people you haven't seen, anything at all that has made you irked or angry.

Then write down all the mitigating things, all the good that has happened, the positives you can think of. Try and imagine God's Kingdom like a wedding feast – who would be there and why?

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## Prayer

King of rage  
who is enraged by the moral injuries,  
the wrongs of power,  
the losses and griefs of poor decisions,  
cancelled events, misplaced entitlement of our human world,  
hear our prayers for the displaced, the redundant,  
the lonely, the hungry, and the disempowered,  
that we may never come unprepared to your kingdom,  
without our wedding robes, our generosity, our face coverings,  
our kindness, and love,  
in the name of the King of the banquet which is set out for everyone,  
we pray,  
AMEN

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Season: Ordinary time

Themes: