

An Address by Howard Friend at St David's Church – 11th October 2020

Trinity 18, Isaiah 25 vs 1-8, Matthew 22 vs 1-22

Wedding invitations. Now there's a dilemma for the unwary. Many a happy wedding has been preceded by unholy arguments about who's to be invited and who unfortunately must be left out. I'm sure many of you have a story to tell about this conundrum.

Our fourth and last born announced her engagement this summer. A highlight it has to be said in what has otherwise been a testing year. Especially as celebrations and a grand tour for our own 40th Wedding Anniversary went down the swanny. And we're still trying to get our money back from Virgin Atlantic.

On the subject of money (and Weddings). One of my first thoughts on hearing Laura and Joe's great news was - Well – at least it will be cheaper than the other 3 – if they get on with it.

Max 30 guests or is it 15 now. Don't ask Boris cos he won't know.

But it turns out they want to wait till Covid is over and then have a proper (by which they mean) a big wedding.

Who to invite – well now - we've learnt a trick or two from the three times we've been around this particular block. One - set a budget, which is the same for all. Two - most importantly – do something along these lines - organise a smaller lunch time drinks do a week or so after the big day to satisfy all YOUR friends and the OLDER relations, who surprise, surprise don't mind missing the all day marathon of the main event one bit. And for the icing on the cake, ask the bride to wear her dress at that do as a sort of encore. As our other daughter pointed out. It reduces the cost of the dress per view Dad by 50%.

So - Wedding invitations and how to keep everyone happy. I've given you a few tips for the modern age - But - what exactly was Jesus getting at in this Parable from our Gospel Reading.

Well this is a Parable directed at the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders about who gets invited and who gets into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our first reading, from Isaiah, with its references to great food, vintage wine, an end to death and tears and ALL people being in on the feast had been disregarded by the religious elite in the intervening years. By Jesus's time it was sort of understood that only they would get an invite to the Messianic Wedding Feast and the riff raff – every one else - didn't get a look in. They would get in because of what they had done in keeping the letter of the law.

But Jesus actually had the same view as the prophet Isaiah. The Kingdom of God is open to all. (There is no budget here) – but you have to accept the invitation. You

don't get in on merit, you get in because you recognise that Jesus is the true Messiah – the only one who can restore the broken relationship with a God who has always loved us whether we're A listers or way down the list alongside - shall we say the Godparents who never remembered any birthdays despite being Hedge Fund managers. You know the sort.

This generous, open invitation is a serious point which needs emphasising. God's invitation to be part of this feast celebrating the Kingdom of God is open to all. You and me however undeserving we think we are.

Now the second and last point in this Parable interpretation concerns the guy who got in but didn't have the right clothes.

What's that all about? – His treatment seems harsh by modern standards

On this matter of what to wear at a wedding – I was reminded of our most recent family wedding – that of my nephew Harry (and his lovely Emily)

The guests were an eclectic mix – as they say. At one stage I found myself next to one of Harry's fashionable London friends at the bar. We eyed each other with bemusement. I was in my morning suit whilst he had more modern gear, what I can best describe as a Peaky Blinder outfit, a loud check with trousers that showed at least 2 inches of hairy leg.

Each of us was thinking - Wrong gear – No idea. But the point is - allowing for age difference - we had each made an effort to dress in proper wedding gear.

And this man hadn't – he'd turned up in the biblical equivalent of dirty tracky bottoms and a sweaty teashirt. Disrespectful, and I think he knew it, because he had no answer when challenged, and that led to an unfortunate consequence.

Now the explanation of this small piece of the passage is rather tricky I think - but having consulted the commentaries and the counsel of some of my very helpful colleagues - here's my take.

It's Paul in Colossians, and who sheds some light on this. He talks about putting off the old nature: greed, anger, malice, lust, bad language and the rest - like you take off old clothes and by the power of the Holy Spirit putting on new clothes befitting a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven: of compassion, kindness, humility, justice, patience and so on.

So you see God's invitation to his Kingdom is inclusive. But we have a responsibility as invited guests to be open to the influence of the Holy Spirit in changing us to be more like Jesus. We need to discard the old and put on the new.

This guy was not serious about being part of the Kingdom of God. (Wrong gear no idea)

A last word about a possible misinterpretation of this Parable – in my view. This putting off the old and putting on the new in terms of our spiritual nature is a process – it doesn't happen overnight. Common sense tells us that and plenty of other scriptures attest that this is so.

Some of us try to put on the new clothes before shedding the old. It doesn't work.

Anyone can tell – you look ridiculous.

So folks – we're all invited to the party

What are you going to wear?