

So today, another parable addressed by Jesus to the chief priests and elders of the people – the Jewish officials of his day. But this time, not a story about a vineyard, but about a wedding feast.

And not just ANY wedding feast – but one that involves a king and his son, some ornery invitees, cold-blooded murder, the destruction of cities, and a ragtag group of afterthought guests. Sounds pretty intriguing. . . and it is. . .

But maybe most intriguing of all – the end of the story. . . After all the guests have assembled, the king spots a man without a proper wedding garment and orders that he be shown the door. > Actually, his words are more severe: “Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”

Granted, this ending makes for some great drama – but is there more that Jesus wants us to get from it?

Well of course there is – so perhaps we should go back and start at the beginning – which, is a very good place to start. . .

So recall this is the third installment in a series of rebukes Jesus gives directed toward the Jewish leaders.

In context, Jesus has been teaching in the temple area following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The chief priests and elders, rankled by his popularity with the people, interrupt his discourse and demand that he give a good reason why he has the right to open his mouth and teach on their turf.

In response to their challenge – Jesus, in those parables about the vineyards – has twice told them “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing good fruits.”

This theme is continued in this parable as the chief priests and elders would be cast as the original invited guests – who lose their place at the royal buffet – because they have better things to do – like living life the way they want to – rather than as God is calling them to do – which may or may not be similar to our own situation. . .

The king, that is God, through the prophets he has sent --- then invites anyone who will come to the feast – to come. The servants do just that, and St. Matthew notes in his telling of the story – that the newly invited guests are a motley crew, made up of “both bad and good alike” such as tax collectors and prostitutes.

And then, as the Gospel continues, the king finds a guest not wearing a proper wedding garment. Was this a special kind of tunic, fringed with lace and lined with pockets full of rice and birdseed to throw at the newlyweds?

Not exactly. But it was a nice set of clothes used for special occasions, much like we would wear to a gathering where “business attire” was asked for – and in case like a royal wedding – would have been provided to all the guests by the host.

In this case, the guest without a wedding garment is an underdressed attendee – much like someone wearing a tank top and shorts to a funeral. The gesture would be offensive, a sign that the guest is oblivious to the significance of the invitation, as well as the generosity of the host.

This explains the king’s swift action – and it brings us back to the point of the parable. . . Jesus had said that the kingdom would be taken away from the Jewish leaders and given to a people *producing fruit*.

The wedding feast is an open invitation, but there is a dress code. Everyone is welcome at the table, but the table changes us --- or, to keep with the imagery of the parable --- it changes our clothes. . . If it doesn’t, then we aren’t truly guests. >>

We're wedding crashers --- and our lot lies outside of the laughter and light. "Many are called," Jesus says, "but few are chosen."

From this parable, I think Jesus wants us to see three things.

1st: the gates of the kingdom are open wide. Salvation is not based on ethnicity, education, income bracket, popularity, position in the church, personality type, cultural savvy, athletic ability, or attractiveness. . .

For this reason, we should be very careful not to assume that the people most fit for the kingdom are those who look most like us.

2nd: though the gates of the kingdom are open wide, the kingdom still has gates and we must enter through them. The kingdom does impose conditions on us: **we must bear fruit**. We have a particular kind of clothing to wear to the feast:

As St. Paul writes: we must "put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved: Heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. . ."

A bitter and unforgiving heart is as much out of line for the Christian as the tank-top funeral-goer.

And finally, a point not to be missed – is the kingdom of God is a feast! And we should act like it.

God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven – is to be enjoyed. Our God is a God of laughter, full bellies, and second helpings. In God's presence there is fullness of joy. Do we truly believe that? Because we don't always act like it ---

As Pope Francis said in his encyclical: *The Joy of the Gospel*: "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent---- without Easter! Consequently, one who has heard the Good News of the Gospel must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral. Rather our lives must be aglow with fervor – because joy always tends to spread." [paragraphs 6, 9, 10]

If this is something we believe – and more importantly, are willing to live --- then come to the feast. There's a seat with your name on it. . .