

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God, our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Imagine the guest's anticipation as they file into the banquet hall full of questions and excitement. What are we going to eat? What is on the menu for this great feast? What wines are we going to be paired with the meal? Who will be there to talk to? Old friends, family, and loved ones for conversation, laughing, joy, music, and dancing.

The idea of gathering for a feast with family and friends is enticing to us. Recently Facebook reminded me (Pastor Sam) of a past meal I had enjoyed, I had at the time just posted a photo of the till docket, bragging or maybe marvelling at the cost. I know I shared a seafood tower with my father at that restaurant.

Christmas meals have also been on the agenda in the Modra household, we will be joining my family in early January, and I can guarantee there will be kilos of prawns, and dozens of oysters, if Ruby is lucky some crabs, and I will probably splurge on a rib-eye steak for myself.

Isaiah describes the feast for us,

And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people  
A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees,  
Of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. Isaiah 25:6 (KJV 1900)

Think of the images of food that conjures up. Fat things, aged, mature wine. Perhaps a well-cellaried Grange, only better. The best cuts of meat, Dripping with flavour and fat, tender and Juicy, perfectly cooked.

Who would turn down an invitation like that?

If that isn't the question, you are left asking after hearing this parable. You're not hearing it right and I'd encourage you to go back and read it again. Who would turn down such a bountiful, exciting, and delicious invitation as the one Jesus describes in his parable, as the one Isaiah describes the feast or even as we heard in Psalm 23, he prepares a table before me?

We've seen royal weddings in recent years, the marriage of the grandsons of the queen. Invitations to these events are highly valued. Most people in their right mind would give up anything to go. Why do we have a king in our parable that is rejected?

Some are just indifferent, it seems. Just go off to their usual lives, and don't even care about the King's invitation. Others are hostile to the invite, so hostile that they kill the messengers. What's wrong with these people? Why don't they want to go to this feast? Free food, good food, exceptional food. Endless amounts of wine. But they either have no interest or are hostile. Do they think the food is no good? Do they hate the king? What is wrong with these people?

And maybe you've already considered it. But as we read through this parable and wonder what is wrong with these people, we have to ask, is Jesus talking about me? Maybe I'm the one who's indifferent, the one who is too busy with my own work to go to the feast of the King. Maybe I'm the one who's hostile. Who gets angry and kills the messengers because I'm angry with the king or don't want to go to his stinking feast?

That's certainly what the first hearers understood. They were the indifferent and hostile ones. Of course, we heard last week we can read back here in Matthew 21 that the chief priests, the scribes, and the religious leaders, had already worked out that all these parables were about them. That they were the ones who killed the master's son when he was sent to the vineyard, that they were the

ones who killed the messengers, inviting them to the feast. They knew that these parables were about them. We should understand that they could be about us also.

They could be pointing out our own our own busyness, our indifference to God's invitation or, even our hostility to his invitation when we refuse to receive his messengers who wish to proclaim good news to us. God's messengers aren't bringing to us dirty rotten food and corked stale wine. They're not asking us to drink vinegar. God's messengers are bringing to us a delightful feast. The fattest of fat lambs and calves. Beautiful spreads of seafood. Great wine, that is what why should be delivering. And yet, sometimes we are indifferent and at other times we are hostile.

We should see these parables that Jesus directed at the religious people of the day as a warning for us religious people, a warning to put away our indifference and hostility to God, and to come and receive his feast. This really doesn't look like a happy parable, in fact, it's downright gruesome and gory we end up with war and someone cast out of the feast.

Yet there is a feast. The King has invited guests and there is beautiful food to eat. The tables must be filled with people and the food must be eaten. The plates must be empty, and the wine enjoyed until it is gone. This is the good news that the king is putting on a feast, and even though many are hostile, others are indifferent, the feast will go on and we are invited. The guests are dragged in from all over the place anyone who is seen is dragged into the feast.

But the bad news seems to go on. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Matthew 22:11–12 (ESV) You've been dragged into a feast why haven't you dressed appropriately? Why have you not dressed to the hosts' requirements? And he doesn't even answer the king when the king asks where are your clothes? No, 'Oh, I didn't have any, Sorry, Sir, may I have some' or 'I didn't have time your servants dragged me off the street'. 'I couldn't afford them'. 'They didn't fit.' Any answer is better than no answer here. Not even a request for grace. 'Please forgive me, Sir, for not dressing well.' This man at the end of the parable thinks that he is OK as he is, he won't even respond to the King's request regarding his clothes, and it appears the King is angry with the servants for letting him in. We should understand that this could be us also when we are self-righteous and think we deserve to be in the feast. Without putting on God's clothing.

We are going to transition to one of our other readings, Philippians Chapter 4. When Paul tells us more about the feast, he says. 'Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.' Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Think about these things, truth, honour, justice, purity, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise! Think about these things, think about the feast. Think about the truth of Christ's forgiveness for you. Think about his feast that is set out for you especially the feast that you receive at this altar, which is a foretaste of the feast to come. Think about honourable works, just works, works of truth and words of truth. Think about Christ's purity for you, his righteousness for you. Think about these things for these are the things of the feast that take us away from our own self-righteousness, indifference and hostility to God and sit us down at his table.

The beautiful things are the things on God's menu at the feast. They are to remind us of and to tangibly deliver God to us.

The weather predictors tell us we are now in an el-nino climate pattern, indicating dryer than usual winter and less summer rain in Eastern Australia. Too much rain can cause us disaster as can too little, but water is God's gift. This is one of the beautiful things that we should think about. It seems pretty mundane and normal that it rains in winter or is dry in summer and even though we comment on the weather often we don't usually consider it as a gift from God. Water is God's gift to us. It is a gift of his creation, and it should remind us of that. But more than that water and large amounts of rain should remind us of more than just creation. It should remind us of the destruction of the flood and whenever there's a small flood, we should think about the destruction of the flood and the promise that God attached after the flood to his rainbow that he would never destroy the whole Earth by a flood again. Water and rain should remind us not just of destruction, but of God's salvation. It should remind us of the promises of the rainbow, which point us to the promises of the cross. It's little wonder that God chose water to attach these promises to us, water should also remind us of our baptism and the name that Christ put on us, his own name, his own mark, his cross marked on us as a sign that Christ the crucified, has redeemed us.

Another thing of beauty is the cross. And we should think of this cross for us. The beauty of hearing the words 'Your sins are forgiven.' The praise-worthy act of being dressed in new clothes, Christ's righteous clothes, attired for a wedding feast. These are the things that Paul tells us to think of.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8–9 (ESV)

When God presents us with the beautiful things of this world, such as his water, bread and wine, his words, and his cross, we should be reminded that he created us, redeemed us, and made us holy. All his work is aimed at driving away our self-righteousness, indifference, and hostility so that we may join him in the feast.

The God of peace be with you all. Amen.