

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

October 12, 2014

Proper 23A/Ordinary 28A/Pentecost +18

The readings this week:

- Exodus 32:1-14
- Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23
- Philippians 4:1-9
- Matthew 22:1-14



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

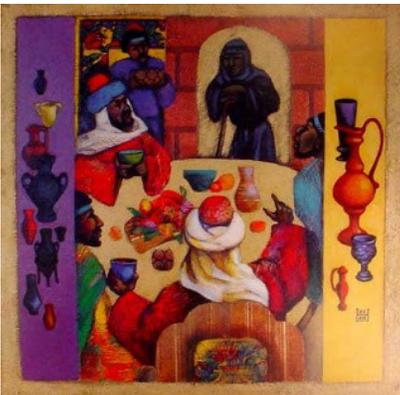
All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go

Did I ever tell you I once met the King of Norway? Went to Church with him. Had dinner with him? Got all dressed up. Even combed my hair. It would be remiss of me not to say that I was one of 1500 in Trondheim Cathedral with him – and on the back but one row. And also, he was actually in the (VIP) dining room next door to me at lunch-time. But I was honored to be there. And that's what gets to the heart of our reading this week – feeling honored by an invitation from the king. And yet everything goes pear shaped in a short space of time.

First of all, the servants sent out to bring in the invited guests report that they're not coming. Whilst not actually begging them to come, the king comes closest to going down on bended knee and implores the guests a second time: 'Look, everything is on the table, the prime rib is ready for carving. Come to the feast!' As Catherine Tate would say, they're not bothered. They've better things to do, '...one to weed his garden, another to work in his shop. The rest, with nothing better to do, beat up on the messengers and then killed them.' The king is infuriated.

Then comes the first of my problems with this passage. The king sends his soldiers to destroy those who refused his invite and to level their city. All of a sudden the New Testament God of love is replaced by the vengeful God of hate reminiscence of the pages of the Old Testament.

Ok. Perhaps we can overlook that momentary lapse of reason for in the next breadth we discover a much heartier king telling his servants: 'We have a wedding banquet all prepared but no guests.



The Wedding Feast by Nelly Bube

The ones I invited weren't up to it. Go out into the busiest intersections in town and invite anyone you find to the banquet.'

Now that's more like it.

But then comes my second problem. The king all happy now

begins to wander amongst his (uninvited but much welcomed) guests – only to discover some interloper isn't properly dressed. Now I don't know enough about Middle Eastern wedding customs from the time of Jesus, but did the guest wear some sort of gown/outfit prepared by the host? Methinks not. So what follows seems a bit unreasonable.

The king said, 'Friend, how dare you come in here looking like that!' The man was speechless, and quite rightly so. He was just off down the Red Lion for a pint and a game of darts when he was dragged unceremoniously to the guild hall – although actually it was quite an honor to go to the wedding banquet for the king's son. He didn't see the printed invite. He didn't know the dress code. He didn't know what time last carriages were. He didn't know who the DJ was.

So the king tells his lads: 'Get him out of here—fast. Tie him up and ship him to hell. And make sure he doesn't get back in.' I like that, make sure he doesn't get back in! Who is he? Houdini? He's bound up like a Christmas turkey, he's fed-exed to the outer reaches of hell. He won't be sneaking in through the back door.

The parable concludes (are these the words of Jesus, or the words of the king??): *"That's what I mean when I say, 'Many get invited; only a few make it.'"* (All quotes from The Message)

Then there's silence. Well, what can you say? Can you see a practical lesson to be learnt here? Jesus didn't finish by saying 'Go and do likewise'. There's no real nugget of wisdom just waiting to be revealed – I know, the end result of our community outreach scheme is to nuke all those who don't want to come! Can't see it being applied by many churches.

This is one of those passages at which we – more often than not – shrug our shoulders at. But what would our faith be if it didn't contain many uncomfortable and unsettling episodes that confound and frustrate us. Faith is about wrestling with God, grappling with his wisdom. Faith is knowing that there are more questions than answers. Faith knows than pain and hurt sit side by side with goodness and faithfulness. Faith is discovering that good and bad alike sit in the kingdom. Faith is about a tremendous journey of heartache and happiness. Faith is ... good stuff.

~ Neil Chappell, [A Weird Thing](#)

Reflecting on the Word



*Dance
Around the
Golden Calf*
Emil Nolde,
1910



1st Reading: [Exodus 32:1-14](#)

Why were the people upset with Moses? Why were the people upset with God? Why did they create the golden calf? What did the people do to honor their new representation of Yahweh? If the people are using the golden calf as a symbol for Yahweh, what is the issue that God has with the golden calf? How do God and Moses respond to the golden calf? What had to happen for God to remain with the people of Israel? How do we attempt to make God in our own image? How can you keep God as the focus of your life instead of these other things that take over as our first priority? Are you able to still participate in these activities if they have become idolatrous in your life? Explain. [Nurturing Faith](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23](#)

Where is the balance between focusing on our sins versus focusing on God's grace? How can we avoid deception here? Some argue that we are not to view ourselves as sinners at all, but only as "saints who occasionally sin." Is this balanced teaching? Why/why not? What are some modern, American forms of idolatry? When do legitimate things become idols? [Bible.org](#)



I Worried

I worried a lot. Will the gardens grow, will the rivers flow in the right direction, will the earth turn as it was taught, and if not, how shall I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven, can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows can do it and I am, well, hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it, am I going to get rheumatism, lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing. And gave it up. And took my old body and went out into the morning, and sang.

~ [Mary Oliver](#), from her book *Swan*

Praying Toward Sunday

Lord, sometimes I forget. I forget that day your people refused to enter their Land. I forget those times your people worshiped other gods. I forget those times you forgave their infidelity—again and again. But this morning, Lord, I remember. I remember how, through all their failures, your love endured. I remember how, through all my failures, your love endured. Though I have often forgotten you, you have never forsaken me.

And as I remember what happened to them and what's happened to me, I say, "Hallelujah!"

~ Prayer from Psalm 106, *Chris Altrick*, [True North](#)

3rd Reading: [Philippians 4:1-9](#)

Do you find your stand in the Lord to be firmer or weaker than it was a year ago? What has made the difference? In verse 2 Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntyche "to agree with each other in the Lord." Why do you think he is so concerned about their relationship? How can each of the promises and commands listed in verses 4-7 help you to be joyful, peaceful and free from anxiety? How can improper thoughts rob us of the peace God desires for us? How can true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy thoughts help to cleanse our minds and restore our tranquility? What should be your response to disagreements within your church or fellowship group? In verse 9 Paul tells us that the God of peace will be with us as we practice what we have learned. What have you learned in this passage that you need to put into practice? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 22:1-14](#)

Who is the son? Who would the guests represent? Why do you think Jesus used the idea of a banquet to represent heaven? How would you react if you were invited to a wedding for the son of the ruler or president of your country? What is the reaction of the first set of invited guests in the story? The Bible says that God extends an invitation to us. He is knocking at the door waiting for us to invite him into our lives. If people are like the guests in the story, what kind of responses could we expect to God's invitation? Who finally gets to come to the wedding? How are these people different from what you expect wedding guests to be? If the wedding represents God's kingdom, what kind of people will be part of God's kingdom according to this story? Jesus concludes his story by saying, "Many are called, but few are chosen." How is this true in the story? What do you think Jesus intended this statement to mean in regard to the kingdom of heaven? [International Student Ministry](#)