

Sermon for October 12, 2014
Matthew 22:1-14

The parable we hear in today's Gospel reading has a dark history associated with it. This parable along with the one from last week have often been used across the centuries to build hatred between Christians and Jews and to justify Christians mistreating, even killing those of the Jewish faith.

The parable today is what we could call the low point in an intense family feud. When Matthew wrote this Gospel the followers of Jesus did not yet call themselves Christians. They were followers of the Way or followers of the rabbi Jesus. The Jewish family was struggling with how to be faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the biggest fighting came over whether or not to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's long promised Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Those of us who have or have had fights between family members know how intense and painful they can be—mainly because those we are fighting with know us so well and know just what buttons to push to hurt us the most. Matthew is no different. Last week he put words of judgment on the lips of the chief priests and elders when they stated that those who killed the landowner's son would themselves be killed as punishment for not listening to him. This week he has the king send out soldiers to destroy those who refused the invitation to the wedding feast—who killed and mistreated the king's slaves.

Matthew gets very dark and very violent in this parable. Why? Because at this point in the family feud Matthew is willing to say that God not only rejects those of the family who have rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but that God has sent the

Roman army to destroy their beloved Temple as punishment. Matthew knows just what buttons to push to get back at those who have thrown this part of the family out of the Temple!

Many of us today have the same situation in our families as Matthew did—people we care deeply about who don't believe the same things that we believe. Many of us have family members who don't think going to church is important or that baptizing their children is important. We have family members who marry people of different faiths or who have no faith at all. Is the only outcome for those we love to be destroyed because they have refused the invitation from the king?

Is condemnation for those we love who don't believe as we do the only response we have? Too often it feels that way because we think that we are being unfaithful if we don't condemn them. But we aren't Matthew's community. We aren't the minority who are trying to make sense of our rejection and alienation from our family. We are disciples of Jesus who hear the good news even in this parable that God invites both the good and the bad to the wedding feast because God's love is expansive and radically inclusive! We are also those disciples who can see through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus just how far God will go to make this invitation of grace, but to also see that God's words of love and forgiveness are more powerful than any words of punishment, hate or fear.

Because of this we don't need to condemn those who believe differently than we do, but we can trust that the God we see in the life of Jesus Christ does care for those who don't respond to the invitation just as God has graciously cared for

us. We can trust as Paul does in his letter to the Philippians: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Can we practice trusting God enough so that we don't condemn but instead pray for those we love? When we do, we might find ourselves being able to share **why** what we believe is important to us rather than just insisting **that believing** is all that matters. Can we then respect the questions and struggles our loved ones are going through, even admitting that we have questions of our own? Can we offer our care and support in the name and example of the one who died rather than condemn and who was raised to offer peace rather than retribution? If we can do this we may find out that this patient understanding and loving support can be the most powerful witness we can offer.

Our God gives us chance after chance to accept the invitation. Our God gives us the robe of righteousness for us to wear. Our God judges us with grace and mercy even when we deserve condemnation. These are the things that we can trust and these are the things for which we can pray for our loved ones.