



One Page Sermon

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The wedding banquet

Recap of Sermon from 3/12/23 by Robb McCoy
Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

In 1988 the rap group N.W.A. released their debut studio album entitled "Straight Outta Compton." Within a year, the record was certified platinum, selling over one million copies. In 1990 Public Enemy released "Fear of a Black Planet," which was a critical and commercial success. The lesser-known Getto Boys made headlines when Tipper Gore used them as an example in her crusade against obscene and violent lyrics in music. Their "City Under Siege" was released in 1990.

While experiencing commercial and in some ways critical success, groups such as these were also vilified for glorifying violence and for being anti-police. While many protested their lyrics for glorifying violence, the artists themselves insisted that they were not glorifying anything. They were simply reporting the truth.

They lived in a violent world, so the stories they told in their music was violent. They described a nation – and the city of Los Angeles in particular – as a sort of "powder keg." Their songs talked about police harassment, violence, and systemic racism that was boiling over. They talked of strained relations within changing communities, and the economic realities that pushed young men into selling drugs.

Many political and religious leaders criticized, challenged, and even threatened groups like Public Enemy and N.W.A., but in 1992 the city of Los Angeles exploded in violence after the police officers who beat Rodney King were all found not-guilty. In his first album after the LA riots, former member of N.W.A. Ice Cube wrote the line "I told you that it would happen and you heard it, read it... Said it? yep. Regret it? Nope. Now listen to my big black boots as I step."

The violence in their music was not prescriptive. The purpose was not to get people to be violent. It was not inciting anger or dangerous race relations. It was describing the world as it already was. It gave voice to emotions that were already felt. They shed light on the violence, the anger, and the growing resentment.

This all comes to mind as I read this difficult parable that Jesus shared in today's text. David Lose, a seminary preaching professor, wrote of this parable: "Let's just admit it: this is an ugly parable. No amount of generalizing about God's hospitality or vulnerability or invitation is going to do away with that. In fact, I think that straying into generalities is a huge mistake, as it glosses over the serious nature and inherent danger in passages like this. So I would urge you either to preach this parable in its distinct and unattractive particularity"

This parable has been used to justify horrendous violence against Jewish people. This story is fodder for antisemitism for lazy interpreters and hurtful preachers. Interpretations of this parable that lead people to dehumanize Jewish people, and justify violence against them must be dismantled.

Jesus was not prescribing violence. He is not saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is a violent place of retribution, anger, and locking people up. The story that he told was violent because he lived in a violent world. The religious authorities were already angry at Jesus. The tension and conflict was already high. In the verse just before this story, Matthew tells us that, "Now when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard the parable, they knew Jesus was talking about them. They were trying to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, who thought he was a prophet."

This parable of the wedding banquet is told as a response to the fact that the religious leaders wanted to arrest him. This arrest happened in just a few short days. It is important to note that the city of Jerusalem is also a generation from utter destruction at the hands of the Romans. There is a sense of urgency and impending doom that Jesus captures with this strange and troubling parable.

This parable, like the rappers in the 80s, was describing a system that already existed and was predicting a doom that was to come. And yet, Jesus still calls the Kingdom of Heaven a banquet. It is a table, full of food and hospitality. Despite the violent circumstances that led to this moment, the ultimate goal is still a banquet. It is a banquet, and all – the good and the evil - are invited to the celebration.

It feels arbitrary that the guest who isn't dressed properly is thrown out. Yet it was the man's refusal to speak that led to his extraction. He was offered a chance, and he did not get dressed. This is a reminder that our role in the party is more than just showing up. There should be something that changes when we come to the Kingdom. We are called to "put on Christ." These are party clothes we must wear – the clothes of grace, generosity, humility, and love. Simply showing up isn't enough. We have to put on Christ too.

This prophetic parable is a reminder of the difficulty of simple allegorical analysis of Jesus' parables. This Strange Kingdom defies simplistic explanations. There is a strangeness of the Kingdom that we may never fully grasp, but in the meantime we invite, and we accept the invitation, and clothe ourselves for the banquet; knowing that despite the complicated circumstances, the Kingdom of Heaven is a celebration.