

Bible reading: Matthew 22:1-14

A wholehearted response to God's invitation

Jesus tells a story in which invitations are sent out for a wedding banquet. The invited guests find excuses not to come, so others are invited in their place. But a man is thrown out because he is not dressed appropriately.



Bible notes



In this parable, as in the preceding two, Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders. This wedding banquet story follows immediately on the tail of his direct comment that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to those who produce kingdom fruits (21:43). Jesus' earlier comment is illustrated as those who have been invited to the wedding banquet refuse to come, and the king throws open the invitation to all. The people of God were set apart by God, a chosen people, not in the sense of being elite, but rather chosen to show God to the other nations. Having failed to take this seriously, they have lost their status.

There are some stark images in this story. The invited guests do not merely fail to show up: they refuse, they insult, they kill the messengers. The king does not merely feel anger: there is a severe consequence. Those who are invited instead do not fall into certain categories; everyone is invited, good and bad. As an image of the kingdom of heaven, God is generous and our response matters.

The custom was for the host – in this case the king – to provide wedding robes for the guests. All guests were dressed similarly, so role and status were irrelevant. The guest in the parable who has continued to wear his own clothes wasn't wholehearted in his acceptance. He has not joined in with the necessary preparation for the banquet. He has stood apart, attending on his own terms and this, too, has a severe consequence. The symbolism here is that of clothing representing one's spiritual state (see, for example, Romans 13:12, Galatians 3:27). All are welcome in the kingdom of heaven, but a wholehearted acceptance of God's invitation is needed.

First impressions

- What comes to mind when you hear the words 'a wholehearted response'?
- What does such a response to God look like?
- How might we encourage others to rejoice with us?



God invites us into relationship with him. What will your reply be? Write 'Yes!' on a large piece of card. Using crayons, sparkly shapes, stickers, glue and other craft items, decorate your reply to show how special God's invitation and how excited you are to accept.

LISTEN



BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* is a staple of Saturday night TV. Do you like dancing or watching? Are you more likely to respond to an invitation or shy away? Listen to these two songs and think about God's invitation. Perhaps you might want to dance. 'I won't dance' by Frank Sinatra and 'I hope you dance' by Lee Anne Womack.

Pray 

Eternal God, you clothe us with forgiveness, you cover us with your grace, you feed us with your word, you robe us with your generosity, you root us in your faithfulness, you gather us in your love, you invite us to be your disciples, and you go all out to draw us all in and call us each by name. Amen.

Write

Look at yourself in the mirror and think about being dressed in the things that matter to God. With lipstick or a whiteboard pen, write on a mirror what kind of attitudes and behaviours God wants to dress you in. For ideas look at Colossians 3:12-17.

Sing



Psalm 23 is one of the readings for this week and is often read at weddings and funerals. Try singing along to version of 'The Lord's my Shepherd' that was sung at Queen Elizabeth II's wedding and funeral. In the psalm, God also prepares a table for us – a feast to which we are invited.