The Kingdom of God Is Like….

Sometimes the lessons are really sweet and comforting, as in "come to me all you who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest….," and "blessed are the poor and meek and those who mourn…"

Such readings are like a fluffy pillow, comfortable and soothing.

And then there's today's gospel reading, which is like a 2x4 aimed right between our eyes!

And I know many folks wonder, why can't God just stick with that gentle word for us?

Why these 2x4's?

Well, my guess is that sometimes that's what it takes to get our Attention.

Particularly when it comes to the nitty gritty of our often stubborn, self-obsessed, me first human nature.

Like a pus filled infection, some lancing is needed before the healing can begin.

Let's start with the parable.

It starts out with everyone being invited to a wedding feast.

Unfortunately, most folks beg off for a million and one reasons, resulting in disaster for those who beg off.

That disaster leads to a whole new invitation — this time to the social nobodies.

The drunks and invalids.

The addicts, no-good-knicks and miscreants.

And amongst them is the guy with no tuxedo!

Who's thrown out on his ear!

So what on earth is Jesus talking about?

Maybe he's getting at what the first reading is getting at.

Let's spend just a moment with these ancient Israelites — since Jesus seems to be making the same point in our gospel lesson.

There's poor Moses commiserating with God high in the mountains when the people suddenly get amnesia!

Moses?

Who's Moses?

Because Moses has been gone awhile.

So suddenly the "what have you done for me lately" mentality sets in.

Leading them to do something quite dramatic, yet quite predictable too.

Remember, they've been called out of slavery into a life of freedom.

Freedom rooted in trust in God.

They had next to nothing.

They left Egypt with very little.

Yet their trusting response to freedom's call allowed this band of nitwits to witness the destruction of the world's most powerful army!

But freedom and trust are among the most difficult things for human beings to stick with.

The expiration date comes faster than week old milk.

So they do what humanity's done since the dawn of time; they opt for "our way" and throw "God's way" in the rubbish.

Removing the glasses of freedom and trust, they put on the glasses of human control.

With the golden calf being the perfect symbol for this switcheroo.

Because the golden calf is made out of their wedding rings and tooth fillings and money.

Prime examples of human power and control, as freedom and trust are quickly exchanged for slavery to our stuff.

When we worship our stuff, the consequence of that worship is always disaster.

Not because God is mean.

But because worshipping "things" violates our fundamental nature.

We are made in the image and likeness of God!

We are God's co-creators.

And we debase our high calling when we fall down in worship before the very things that exist to serve us - things like money and sex and civil society.

Christianity itself can become an idol — opposed to the life of faith and trust to which we are called.

Like when folks say Christianity supports the annihilation of another country, as the Rev. Robert Jeffers claims.

Or claiming Christianity is only about loving family and friends.

Or that Christians can reject refugees and immigrants because our laws say we can.

That's when Jesus reaches for the 2x4!

Christianity is indeed about love — but the love of our enemies.

It's about caring — but especially for those whom society rejects.

It's about welcoming — yes, even those seen as invaders or the undeserving.

When Jesus invites us to think of the kingdom of God in the light of today's parable, perhaps what he's asking us to see is that our first reaction to this strange kingdom is to find any excuse possible to say "no thanks!"

"Freedom and trust," as offered to the Israelites, as offered to us, is a harsh and dreadful thing.

It means rejecting military solutions to conflicts between our fellow human beings.

It means my money is not my money — it belongs to the gal who can't pay her electric bill this month.

It means unlearning everything I thought I knew about being human.

An unlearning we know by the term Metanoia, which means "enter into the larger mind of God."

No wonder "many are called but few are chosen."

It's far easier to place our faith in the military or the economy or the celebrity — but the result of such misplaced faith is always anxiety, misery, and death.

And what about the fellow who shows up in his blue jeans and tee shirt?

No tuxedo.

He's promptly booted out of the fun.

At first, this seems incredibly cruel.

Who keeps a tux nearby just in case you get a last minute wedding invitation?

So why is he in such hot water?

Perhaps because the missing wedding garment isn't a tuxedo.

Perhaps the missing wedding garment is a symbol for living the life of faith.

The fact is, scripture is full of clothing being a stand-in for a life based on faith and trust.

St Paul encourages the Galatians to "put on the baptismal garment of Christ."

He implores the Colossians to "clothe yourselves in compassion, kindness, mercy and patience."

And then there's the prophet Isaiah, who speaks of God "clothing Israel with righteousness."

While St Peter encourages his small community "to be clothed in humility."

It's a way of reminding us that a faith that fails to change us — is no faith at all.

Our faith, if it's alive, will change us.

And change we must if we wish to wear the wedding garment of the kingdom of God.

The reason this guy in blue jeans is in hot water is because rather than acting like an honored guest, rather than experiencing a sense of awe at the sheer mercy of a host who rounds up every last child, woman and man, deserving and undeserving; rather than having a sense of quiet gratitude, our friend bellies up to the bar and stuffs his face with the shrimp cocktail; wiping his hands on his stained blue jeans: stuck in self-absorbed self-satisfaction. Capon, Parables of Judgment and Grace, 455.

He apparently sees no difference between "All You Can Eat Night" at Chili's and the wedding feast for the King's son.

The garment he lacks is sewn not with hands, but with hearts.

And there is this.

The wedding garment is a single piece of cloth.

It cannot be divided.

Like Christ's garment that the soldiers gambled over, at his crucifixion.

The seamless garment tells us something about who we are to be at the wedding feast of God, and who we are to become as we journey to that place.

We are to become seamless.

With one another.

And with God.

The student asks: "How shall we treat others?"

And the teacher replies: "There are no others."

We are called to embrace a unity of spirit.

A sense that all people, all things, all creation, and all that is uncreated, is intimately connected.

Interwoven.

Indeed, a seamless garment.

Our faith, if it is alive, will change us.

And yet, we cannot make these changes alone.

So we gather here each week, the bad and the good, the spiritually advanced and the newest of new comers, the fervent believers and those holding onto faith by a whisker.

Together, every week, we come here to be immersed in the water of life.

To don, once again, our baptismal clothing.

That against all odds and against pressure from every quarter, we recommit ourselves to focusing our lives on "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable."

From these come the wedding garments suitable for a guest of the King.

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