

Proverbs 25.6-7

Psalm 112

Hebrews 13.1-8

Luke 14.1,7-14 (*Parables about wedding guests and inviting those on the fringes who can't invite us back to our banquet*)

Luke has lots of stories about meals! In the gospel story we have just heard, Jesus has been invited to eat at the house of the leader of the Pharisees on the Sabbath – which will have been quite an occasion for the local Pharisees and other officials in the town. Jesus is observing the people who are coming to the meal and their behaviour causes him to tell the two parables we have just heard– the first about the behaviour of the guests, and sitting in the high places; the second about the host and who to invite when you give a dinner party. As is true for all of Jesus' parables, whilst they are about something that is part of ordinary life, they are actually about the kingdom of God.

This morning I would like us to use our imagination to think about these parables.

Imagine:

A young member of the royal family is getting married in your local Cathedral. It's just been announced in the news. A couple of days later you and your family receive an invitation to attend the wedding – the service in the cathedral and the reception.

You are very surprised to receive the invitation, How would you be feeling? Thrilled? Excited? Wondering why? Apprehensive? Worried? You immediately phone who is close to you - your spouse/ parent/ best friend or someone else. You have a good old chat about it and you start to feel excited and to think yes, we will accept the invitation and attend the wedding.

As the weeks go by you discover that all your neighbours have been invited, too, no matter what they are like, as have the local shop keepers, the cashiers at the supermarket, and the staff and residents at the local nursing home.

You are beginning to wonder what sort of a wedding this is going to be. The dress code on the invitation says 'lounge suits', but you were thinking of buying yourself a new outfit or suit, but if everybody is going to be there, is it worth the expense?

As the day of the wedding approaches, the national and local press and the gossip magazines are carrying stories about the couple, their friends, the glamour of the couple's new home, the wedding preparations, what the dress will look like, and your excitement returns. You are glad you did make the effort to get a smart looking outfit, afterall.

The wedding guests have been encouraged to travel by public transport wherever possible, and coaches are waiting at the railway station to take people to the cathedral and from there to the venue of the reception. Everything is extremely well organised, but with the numbers involved you have to be patient and join in the crowds who are making their way to the cathedral. There are all sorts ...even people who are barely wearing their Sunday best; some look like they have come off the streets; some wear impossible outfits which you judge completely unsuitable for the occasion. You overhear people saying they have never been to the cathedral before. You hope you will get a good seat in the cathedral, sitting next to people like yourself, who have made an effort to look and behave correctly for the occasion.

The service in the cathedral is beautiful, despite all the people who aren't familiar with church services, and the Bishop does a good job welcoming everyone, and thanking all the guests on behalf of the couple for coming to be part of this joyful occasion. You are pleased you came.

After the service the arrangements to get to the reception are announced, a sit down meal for a thousand people. By now, you are sticking close to some friends who sat near you in the cathedral, hoping that you can sit together at the reception. Will you be able to see the top table? Will you get a chance to shake the hand of the couple; will you be noticed by any of the royals and celebrities who are also present. Will there be a seating plan, or do you have to fend for yourselves? It turns out there is a seating plan – arranged in alphabetical order of surnames, and you are not able to stay with your friends, but end up, sitting at a long table with some students from Pakistan opposite you, a woman who looks like she has come off the streets to the right of you and your family, and a well-to-do couple on your left. Not a celebrity or royal anywhere near you.

You are feeling a bit disappointed, and awkward, perhaps even worried?? Do you need to make conversation with all of these people? What are we going to talk about? At this point you are not sure you want to be here. What sort of a wedding is this? You have never to talk to students from Pakistan? And this girl to your right ...what are you going to say to her? And what will the well-to-do people be like? They take the initiative to introduce themselves, including the Pakistani students.

And as you turn to the girl on your right, she gives you a big smile and says, hi, I'm Mia – isn't this just sick (which is slang for 'awesome')...nice to meet you'. And you smile back, nod your head and ask her where she is from. She chats away and is easy to talk to.

Again, the organisation of the meal is fantastic – there is plenty to drink, and the food is being served at the tables at a reasonable speed. Some of it is quite exotic and provides a great topic

of conversation. It all tastes very good; your shyness and anxiety reduce, and you find yourself having an interesting conversation with the girl on your right. You are quite surprised. The Pakistani students who were very quiet to begin are now talking to the couple on your left. As the meal progresses everyone is chatting away and it looks as if everyone is having a good time. The afternoon wears on, there is a variety of music, some entertaining speeches; the wedding couple come round and greet people, and by the end of the celebration you marvel at what you have just experienced. If you had known beforehand this wedding and the guests would look like, you may not have come. As the coaches arrive to take people back to the station or the villages where they live everyone is in a cheerful mood, people don't mind who they sit next to on the coach, and many say a heart-felt farewell.

You are so very pleased you came; the wedding changes relations in the community in a lasting way, and the memory of this wedding cheers you up in years to come. Amen.