

October 11, 2020

Uffda, this is a challenging gospel lesson. This is one of those lessons' preachers like to avoid... But the more I worked with it, the more I found a personal connection with it.... I'll talk more about that later...

But, first things first, let's dig into this text a little bit... Off the top, what do you think of this King? To me, he kinda sounds like a tyrant...

His subjects don't like him very much; everyone he invited to the wedding banquet didn't show up. In fact, they talk about him behind his back, and kill his slaves, which of course made him mad and he sent his troops to destroy and burn their city. He also noticed that "one person" who wasn't wearing a wedding robe, and had him bound and cast out.

This parable has a history of translation issues. The fundamental question comes in verse two, Jesus is speaking and says, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king." A Berean literal translation of the Greek says, "The kingdom of the heavens (plural) *has become* like a man, a king..."

The Greek word translated as "compared to," also means "assimilate" or "to become..." And because the Kingdoms are plural, Jesus might be saying that there is the one and only Kingdom, and then there is also the kingdom that Humanity has created.

Most translations go with interpreting this as a parable of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. But a lot of translators are starting to change their minds. There's

a lot of clues suggesting that this story is a description of what the Kingdom of Heaven is not like.

Aside from the plurality of the kingdoms and the compare / assimilate distinction, another clue, is that the original Greek refers to the King as “a man, a King.” This emphasizes that Jesus is not talking about God, but rather a real King, a certain King. And the real King the people would associate with that, is King Herod. Who was known to be terribly unpopular and violent-- exactly like the king in the story.

Yet, another clue is the one man who is noticed not wearing a wedding robe and when asked why, remained speechless. The gospel of Matthew makes a big deal out the fact that when Jesus is questioned by the Chief Priests and Pontius Pilate, he remained speechless. So, is the person in the story that is singled out, Jesus speaking of himself? We don't know, but it is uncanny...

Yet another clue is context... This parable comes immediately after the religious people want Jesus arrested. Jesus could be telling us that the Chief Priest, Elders and Pharisees have become like that tyrant human king. The Kingdom of Heaven as practiced by the religious people has become like that Tyrant...

So, is this a parable of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like? Or is this a parable of what Jesus is saying the Kingdom of Heaven has become, based on his interactions with the religious people?

I'll be honest, I have a hard time seeing God as a tyrant. The God I believe in is loving, kind, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The God I confess is forgiving, including and belonging.

Today I'd like to do a little reflecting with the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven.

As Lutherans we have a tradition of talking about two kingdoms, the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom or the spiritual kingdom. Two kingdom theology emphasizes that there is God's way of doing things, and then there are Human ways of doing things...

We also talk about the Kingdom of Heaven as being here, right now... And also, as **not yet**... We live in this in-between time. We see glimpses of the kingdom around us all the time, in all the ways we are molded by the Holy Spirit into being loving, kind and gracious people... And we also know that we are saints and sinners, sin is our reality, and so we also know the kingdom is not here, yet...

Perhaps, is this parable Jesus' way of describing this two-kingdom idea? This two-kingdom theology? I don't know, maybe... I've come to trust the Holy Spirit, and I believe the Holy Spirit can work effectively within different interpretations.

Quick story... When I read this parable, over and over, my attention went to the one man among everyone else, who was not wearing a wedding robe.

The "wedding robe" is a great metaphor, because it's indicative of a celebration of a communion, a couple in union and a community in union. Now, this outsider was not with the program and he was singled out. Have you ever been in a situation where you're the odd man out? I have... and that's why this became personal to me...

Many years ago, at Cross of Christ. I remember sitting in the pews, for years, and while everyone else was following along with the liturgy, reciting confessions, and

creeds and prayers, I had no idea what was going on! And I'm pretty sure if you had asked me why I was here, I probably would have been speechless. Not sure what to say...

Now, while everyone else was with the program, I was not. I was definitely not robed in any awareness of what was going on, definitely not robed in a relationship with God, definitely not robed in any baptism... I certainly had never been robed in a baptismal gown... And I was intentional about not coming up for communion. I was that outsider...

And yet, instead of throwing me out into the outer darkness with all the weeping and gnashing of teeth, Shirley and Alvie, noticed. They put the green hymnal in my hand and started to show me how to follow along. Everyone one of them, took us, my whole family under their wing...

You see, this is what the Kingdom of Heaven does... Instead of casting people out, the Kingdom of Heaven includes...

This is the good news today. While the earthly kingdom, the human kingdom brings violence and casting out and weeping and gnashing of teeth, the Kingdom of Heaven is about forgiveness, love and hope. The Kingdom of Heaven is about bringing people in, and making people belong. The Kingdom of Heaven is about transforming people into being loving, kind and gracious.

And I believe it, because I've seen it. And we can all pray, "Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Amen