

Trinity 20 (2024)

I have not known very many people who have been so fortunate as to receive a royal invitation. Come to think of it, I've only known one. She was a lady from this church. Her name, Eve Holme.

Back in 2006, her sister who lived in Edinburgh alerted her to an appeal that had appeared in the newspaper there.

Her Majesty the Queen was turning 80 and was seeking 100 persons born on the same day in the same year to share in the celebration of her birthday.

To mark the occasion a festive lunch was to be held at Buckingham Palace. Each of those chosen would be allowed to bring one guest.

Eve, who was born in Scotland and was married to an Englishman and a Royal Fusilier, applied and was selected.

In due time, she received a very handsome invitation in the mail.

When the time came for the celebration, she took her daughter as her guest . . . I'm still sore with her for not taking me!

In any event, it was a once in a lifetime experience. She and her daughter were very punctilious in observing the prescribed protocol and had a wonderful time.

But let's suppose that on the day of the event, Eve and her daughter had decided to go shopping or hang out at a pub and had failed to show up at the appointed time.

I doubt Her Majesty would have sent out the Royal Calvary and had the two locked up in

the Tower of London. Nevertheless, snubbing the Queen would have been incredibly rude. It's hard to imagine anyone doing such a thing.

Yet, that is what we find those who received a royal invitation in today's Gospel doing. They refused to come to the King's son's wedding banquet, instead choosing to do something else.

Before we look for applications, I should probably set this parable in context.

At the time of speaking, our Lord had in mind the Jewish people. He was thinking of their tragic failure to respond to God's call made to them earlier by the prophets and now by Him.

Looking ahead, he saw disaster. Jerusalem itself was to be destroyed. This, no doubt, is what He had in mind when He said:

“But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and

destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

In real life, in A.D. 70 the armies of Rome surrounded the Holy City and laid it level to the ground. The great Temple, the pride of the nation, was destroyed. Many, many perished.

Jesus did not rejoice as He saw this calamity approaching. Rather, He wept.

Matthew records Him saying: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37).**

But happily, there is a bright side to the parable found in today’s Gospel. It’s not all gloom and doom.

It also speaks of the door into God's kingdom being thrown open to all. Yes, to you and me.

John in his prologue says: **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John 1:11,12).

This is clearly the historical interpretation of this parable, but its message extends beyond the first century A.D.

Here, we find a three-fold picture of people's response to the royal invitation of the Gospel. Let's look at each.

First, there is the response of **lighthearted indifference**. Making a living, buying more toys, going to sporting events, entertainment . . . these get top billing in many people's lives.

Going to church and doing the things church people do is okay for those who have an interest in those sorts of things, but not for them, at least not at that moment. Maybe they will look at the spiritual component of life in the future, but not now. They are too busy.

Do you know anyone like that? Very likely you do. Standing on the porch of this church each Sunday morning one sees car after car of such folk go by.

Do we give up on them? No, the careless of today may well become the committed of tomorrow.

If you know someone with lighthearted indifference to the Gospel, by all means pray for that person.

Live the Gospel before their eyes. Let that person see Jesus in you.

At propitious moments share the hope that it is within you.

Invite him or her to join you for a service or for some other event at the parish church. Be a witness. ///

And then there is a second response to Jesus' call "Come to the feast. All is ready." That response is **active opposition**.

Those who make this response are represented by those who seize the king's servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

The Gospel always has enemies. While some are content to ignore it, there are others who are actively hostile to it.

The 20th century saw active persecution of Christians in Soviet Russia, and it continues in many places today. Currently, North Korea,

Somalia, Libya and Yemen have the highest rates of reported persecution against Christians.

But you don't have to leave the United States to find opposition. It may be more subtle, but it is just as real.

In 2021, a second grader by the name of Gabrielle in a public school in Illinois had her Bible confiscated.

According to the news story, Gabrielle liked to bring her Bible to school and read it during recess. Sometimes she read it aloud to other children.

Eventually, a teacher hostile to the Gospel noticed what she was doing and took her Bible away.

It seems you can pass out condoms, but Bibles are contraband.

As a sequel to the story, when a Christian legal advocacy group got involved, school officials backed down, at least somewhat.

All of which to say, there will be opposition. Don't be surprised when it comes. Meet it with prayer, grace and determination.

So far, we have looked at two responses to the Gospel: **lighthearted indifference** and **active opposition**.

But we find a third response in this parable. That is **grateful acceptance**.

When those who were originally invited to the king's banquet failed to show up, he sent his servants out to invite all and sundry. And they came.

Here is the positive aspect of the story. When the Gospel is announced some, perhaps many, find themselves drawn to it.

The Holy Spirit opens their minds and hearts, and they find themselves believing the message, perhaps almost against their will.

Tom Wright compares it to telling a joke in a foreign language. You are surprised when people get it and laugh.

So, it is when the Gospel is announced. People of all backgrounds and ethnicities find themselves embraced by it. They will sit down with Abraham's offspring at the marriage feast of lamb.

What Paul says in Romans 10:9 becomes a reality in their lives: **“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”**

So, we find here in this parable great encouragement. The Gospel is powerful and

compelling. It is capable of changing hearts and lives. It's for all people everywhere.

What might we take away from this portion of the parable? /// I think it is this:

Take heart. Society at large may be in a state of freefall. There may be much opposition. Yet, God is greater. Truth is stronger than falsehood.

The Kingdom Jesus proclaimed and embodied will come. You are on the winning side. Dare to do your part. Be a light where God has planted you. Stand for justice and truth. Practice love and forgiveness. Be bold. Invite others to the kingdom party and do so with confidence.

Some years ago, a question was circulating in Christian circles: **“If it were a crime to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”**

Ask yourself that question in light of the imperatives I have just mentioned. Answer it honestly. ///

The Gospel brings forth at least three responses: lighthearted indifference, actual resistance and grateful acceptance.

Let's focus on the last. Our mission is outside these walls. It is to extend the invitation of the Gospel to all and sundry.

Go forth into your mission field actively looking for opportunities.

I close with these words from a Christian hymn from India:

“The world behind me, the cross before me . . . no turning back, no turning back.”