

Exodus 32. 1-14

Psalm 33

Matthew 22. 1-14

‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless.

Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

This is a difficult parable – how can we say: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ?

This is a parable which also appears in Luke, but in Luke it is without the violent ending – there is something more which Matthew is trying to do with this parable with the violence of the king at the end of this parable. [construction of M, M & L]. Matthew has taken a saying of Jesus and built on it – as has been done with all of the gospels.

- The first clue about the nature of this king is that the Greek The kingdom of heaven may be compared to *a man, a king*. The Greek does not simply say *a king* as is given to us in English.
- So, Matthew means for us not to confuse this king with God;
- Usually in Matthew when Jesus speaks of the kingdom he begins a parable with the words: the kingdom of heaven is like ... But in this parable the opening words are: *the kingdom of heaven may be compared to*.
- Whereas this begins the kingdom of heaven may be compared to: this is not an allegory about God; it’s not an allegory about what the kingdom of heaven is like. Rather, the kingdom heaven may be compared to what is about to be described: an earthly king and the violence of kingdoms.
- So, this king invites guests to the wedding; but they will not come. He is not a king who is particularly liked. So in spite of the lavishness of the banquet people find excuses to not attend.
- The king is enraged and so violently exterminates the invited guests. This is not a king to be trifled with.
- So the next series of guests – everyone you find – know not to refuse the invitation, upon pain of death. It didn’t matter whether people were friend or foe of the king; good or bad in his books. The wedding hall was promptly filled. It’s the kind of event you might find in Putin’s Russia or Kim Jong Un’s North Korea – people mindlessly waving flags with plastic smiles, terrified of being singled out and dealt with.
- Upon attending an ancient wedding banquets guests were issued with wedding robes, a coverall sort of garment. But one of the guests is not robed according to the king’s pleasure. This one without the wedding robe is not willing to put on the cloak of

complicity with the imperial violence. This is a king who demands conformity and will secure it with violence if necessary. But in front of the rage and fury of the violent king this one who is not robed remains silent; *Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe? And he was speechless.* He cannot or will not respond to the accusation.

- From the suffering servant passage from the prophet Isaiah 53 and 54 which we hear on Good Friday – it begins Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? we hear the words: *like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*
- And from the passion account in Matthew we also hear: *The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But Jesus was silent.*"
So in this parable the king says: Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We must remember the context of this parable. We are in a window of time between when Jesus enters Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowd and when he is bound hand and foot and crucified. The parable invites us to *compare* the kingdom of heaven to this kingdom of violence. Jesus' listeners will have heard an echo in the description of a man, a king in the parable with the dynasty of the Herods. It was Herod in Matthew's gospel who ordered the murder of the innocents. Next week we will hear Jesus being asked the question about whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. And Jesus gives them his tricky response which confounds them. The ones who ask him this question are an alliance of disciples of the Pharisees along with what are called the Herodians; these are political leaders loyal to Herod. It is of course it is another Herod who is Rome's puppet at the time of this episode. So the crowd who are also hearing this parable which is targeting the violence of the Roman empire; they know for Jesus' ministry that this is not what the kingdom of heaven is like.

As the cross looms we are invited to compare the violence of the worldly kingdom to the non-violent response of God in Christ to the violence of the cross. This not a God who meets the violence of the cross with more violence but with a non-violent submission to it and in the resurrection a transcendence of it. In the cross Jesus subverts our desire for revenge, even transcends our hope that at least God will eventually overturn the violence of the world with divine violence; in silence Jesus gives himself over to it in order to redeem us from it. God paradoxically lets the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ, be expelled from the world's regimes – utterly excluded from the world's regimes, as the means of launching God's reign on Easter.

Jesus the Messiah comes to show us God becoming King but not at all in the fashion of human kings – or rulers of most kinds. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and never inflicts it. There could hardly be a more shocking difference. And especially shocking as throughout history the church in concert with political power has too often been involved in the violence – or at least justifying or smoothing the pillow of state violence. As Jesus is about to ascend to the throne as Messiah through the Passion, this parable exemplifies this difference through the dramatic story of a brutally violent king.

In the movement toward the cross we are coming toward the clash of kingdoms; but it is not the sort clash we are familiar with; because the divine one receives our abuse; *and with his stripes we are healed.*

Last night the NSW Indigenous Land Council issued a statement in response the Referendum result. It begins:

Recognition in the constitution of the descendants of the original and continuing owners of Australia would have been a great advance for Australians. Alas, the majority have rejected it.

This is a bitter irony. That people who have only been on this continent for 235 years would refuse to recognise those whose home this land has been for 60,000 and more years is beyond reason. It was never in the gift of these newcomers to refuse recognition to the true owners of Australia. The referendum was a chance for newcomers to show a long-refused grace and gratitude and to acknowledge that the brutal dispossession of our people underwrote their every advantage in this country.

And the statement concludes with this call:

We are calling A Week of Silence from tonight (Saturday 14th October) to grieve this outcome and reflect on its meaning and significance. We will not be commenting further on the result at this time.

We will be lowering our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to half-mast for the week of silence to acknowledge this result. We ask others to do the same.

Beginning from last night and continuing through the coming days and weeks we will have an endless cycle of analysis and recriminations, blame and cries of *we told you so*. But those for whom this vote mattered most will be silent.

In these days ahead we might be silent too. A prayerful silence; in solidarity; especially with those who have given so much of themselves in this time.

So we can ponder these things and wonder about the ways of the world and the ways of the kingdom and contemplate these forces at play within ourselves and around us. And we can pray for eyes to see and ears to hear Christ's call to us follow in his way and so receive the life of God.

Andrew Boyle