

Theologian Sharon Ringe writes:

Think back over the recent celebration

of the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

It was *the* event of the season!

Can you imagine those invited not attending, and even making a joke of it?

Even those of us not bowled over by royal pomp and splendor

caught the reruns on television,

to catch a glimpse of The Dress,

or simply because we were charmed

by the sweet affection evident between the bride and groom.

And oh, the "wedding garments" in evidence,

from the elegant and cheerful yellow ensemble worn by Queen Elizabeth,

to the military uniforms covered with medals,

to the extravagant hats and "fascinators"

(Who had even heard the word before this event?)

of other women guests!

That is the type of event evoked

by the beginning of the parable [Jesus tells],

depicted as directed once again to "them"

--the chief priests and elders

who have been the audience of the previous two parables (21:23).

It is a story of etiquette and bad manners that escalate into violence,

and of an arbitrary decree by the king

reminiscent of the royal folly Alice encountered in Wonderland:

"Off with their heads!"

This wedding party began as convention dictates.

A first invitation

(a sort of "Save the date!" notice

that has become common again)

is followed by the summons carried by the host's servants

when the banquet is ready.

Then things start to fall apart.

First, the invited guests simply refuse to come,
and when the second call comes,
they treat the invitation as a joke and go about their business.
More than bad manners are at stake,
for some invitees even assault and kill the servants.
In his anger the king then escalates the confrontation
by sending in his troops to destroy
both the perpetrators and their city.
Apparently the king has judged their bad behavior
to be the opening salvo
of a rebellion that must be quelled,
even at the cost of a portion of the king's own holdings.

With the party ready,
the king is determined that it will go forward,
and so the servants are sent out again,
this time to the very limits of the territory.
(That is what the term means
that lies behind the "main streets" in verse 9).
They are to bring in everyone, "good and bad" (verse 10),
so that the hall will be filled.
When the king plans a party,
the party will go on!¹

Several years ago in Atlanta Georgia,
there was a terrific power wedding scheduled in a suburban church.
A wealthy debutante was engaged to marry an equally wealthy businessman,
and a lavish reception was to follow.
Just hours before the wedding,
the groom got cold feet;
he left his bride – literally – standing alone at the altar.
The wedding, of course, was cancelled.
But what would they do with all that food?
It had already been paid for and prepared.
The Atlanta Constitution reported that buses were sent
to the Salvation Army and several downtown shelters,

¹ WorkingPreacher.org

and they brought street people to the country club,
where they sampled fresh crab and lobster,
and steamed baby carrots
well into the night.

The Kingdom of God IS a party.²
And the bus has come for us
We are invited!

Throughout time

God has been making preparations for the banquet—the party

The rich celebration of the coming Messiah

The prophet Isaiah described the banquet

Isaiah—one of the servants sent to invite the chosen people

One of the servants rejected

The people of Israel had been longing for the Messiah

But when they were invited by the prophets

To come to the Banquet

To enter into the life of hope

To live a life shaped by the love and justice of God

When invited

They were too busy with their own lives

They failed to see the rich preparations

Of the God who loved them

Then the God of all-powerful-love

Let his people fall into the trap they had made for themselves

God let them take the path they were choosing

A path leading away from life

And their nation was taken away from them

And the Messiah was sent for a new people

Outsiders

Both good and bad people

The uninvited became the invited

The world was turned upside down

God's surprising grace has included you and me

² Steven Molin, Terrible Parable

Like a king—God has huge resources
And God has spared no expense
in preparing a banquet for us
the food is all ready
the moment for enjoying it is now
there is an urgency and joy
that makes God's love for us in Christ
the top importance
the first thing in our lives
not because we're afraid to put God in second place
but because there's nothing better
God's love for us
Awakens our sense of joy and purpose
And we want to say "YES" to the invitation
We drop what we are doing
And skip off to the banquet hall

We recognize God's invitation
To dine with Jesus
Is to know Jesus, God's Messiah
Our Messiah
We have been living as though there is no Messiah
Or as if we were Messiah
But we are not
And that desire to seek Jesus
To know him
To follow him
To understand as much as we can
What it means for Jesus to be our Christ
Our Messiah
That desire to seek Jesus
Becomes our ultimate desire
Better than tasting the finest food and wine
Our bodies and our spirits
Hunger
For the rich food of God
Jesus filling our lives

More than the longing a husband has for his wife
More than the loneliness of our hearts
Desiring the affection and warmth of friendship
Our lives are designed even more
to long for the loving presence of God
the person who has everything he or she wants
that one may not even notice this longing for God
but the one who has lost everything does
and may know the love of Jesus
to be the richest food
the best gift from our loving God

Our congregation wants to be part of God's party
We want the love of Christ to flow freely in our worship
We want to be loving servants who go out to invite
The people God is inviting
We as a congregation have enrolled in a school
That will help us seek Jesus
And help us seek those Jesus is inviting
That school is the Missional Leadership Academy
We are paying a tuition to be part of the school
We paid \$500 as the deposit
And every month we will pay \$100
Until we have paid \$2000 all together
Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is also paying part of our tuition
And a congregation in Phoenix, Augustana Lutheran
Is paying another part of it for us
All together it is \$5000 in tuition payments

The first project we have is to take a survey
The Transforming Church Index survey
If we have your email address
You should already have received an invitation
To do the survey online
If not, you can go to our website
Where there are instructions on the homepage

If you do not use a computer
 We have a paper version you can fill out
 The ushers have them
 But we have only 25 that are included and paid for
So if you are willing
 We have volunteers
 who could help you take the survey on a computer
 Just sign your name, and they will contact you
 And schedule a time with you
This survey is for all people
 Not just members
 Everyone who worships with us
The purpose of the survey
 Is to help us understand our congregation
 And our readiness for growing in effectiveness
 Growing in our loving outreach to our community
As of Thursday, 20 people had already taken the survey
 So we are well on our way to finishing

Our lives are all about responding
 Responding to the love our mothers and fathers showed us
 Responding to the direction of teachers
 Responding to the kindness of friends
First comes God's love for us in Christ
 Lavish preparations for a party
 Then comes our lives lived in response
 All our gifts
 Are given in response to God's Gift of Jesus
 "We love
 Because God first loved us
 We love
 Because God first loved us
 We love
 We love
 We love
 Because God first loved us!"

