

Sermon for Sunday, October 15, 2023 Baptism of Genevieve Talmage

This Gospel reading may seem like an odd one for a day when we celebrate such a glorious event as the baptism of little Genny, and the day after we celebrated the blessing of the marriage of her parents, who were wed by civil ceremony several months ago.

What a story in this parable! All this annoyance about guests begging off, getting random people off the street to come to the banquet, and then complaining that those rando didn't show up with the right garment on! If we read it literally, we scratch our head, for where is the grace and the love and the welcome in this story?

It's there, of course. It's within a parable, and Jesus always turns the script upside down to make a point.

So what IS the point here? How does it have anything to do with the blessing of a marriage, or the welcoming of a tiny beautiful new Christian into the faith?

One angle of view is the fact of celebration: the king is celebrating his child's marriage, and how people respond matters. The king expects them to take this event seriously. This is something important, and if the king invites them, they should make every effort to be a part of it. No lame excuses!

When those who should take it seriously do not commit as they should, the king is angered, particularly when he extends a second invitation, which the invited guests treat as casually as they did the first. Suffice to say, the king is unhappy and responds accordingly. Then he invites others, even people who do not have the status to be invited to such an event. And then an odd thing happens: one person shows up in the equivalent of a t-shirt and cut-offs and flipflops. He is not prepared for the magnificence of the banquet. He is not prepared to honor the king, and once again, the king is angered and tosses this fellow out.

It all sounds rather odd. If parables often seem to identify the primary character as God, this one doesn't present that primary character in a positive light, does it?

But let's look at it another way.

Think of how God longs to be in relationship with us. Think of the invitation he offers to deepen that relationship. And then think of how we sometimes avoid that invitation, for any variety of reasons. We may feel like we already go to church on Sunday, so what does it matter? We may think that we feel God's presence

when we take a walk in the woods, although when we are there we do not pray, we do not converse with God, we do not recognize God's grace offered to us. Relationship is a two-way street. If we do the bare minimum to nurture that relationship with God, or if we regularly ignore the importance of that relationship, I can imagine that God wonders why we are not in conversation, why we don't pay attention to this most primary of relationships.

Think, too, of how we often don't prepare ourselves for that relationship, praying, reading and meditating on Holy Scripture. Think of our obligation to teach newcomers to the faith about what it means to follow Christ.

This gospel is all about relationship with God, and that certainly does speak to yesterday's blessing liturgy and today's baptism.

Daniel and Bridget are in relationship with God, and it was important to them to lean into that relationship by asking for God's blessing on their union. They know that without God's loving support, it is difficult to focus on what is truly important in their marriage. They have prepared for this, with my help and understand the power of God's love in their marriage and in their individual lives.

Genny, this beautiful little girl, is baptized into relationship with God today. Promises are made on her behalf by her parents and godparents, and by you, as well, her faith community, to help grow into her understanding of what that relationship means and how to foster it and make it grow. She will learn from all of us about living the life of faith, not just on Sunday mornings, but in every moment.

The darkness of this Gospel talks about what happens if we do not take the relationship seriously and if we do not prepare for that relationship. But the shadow disappears when we do take the relationship seriously, when we do prepare. We then feel the fullness of joy, and the mutuality is complete.

So on this day of baptism, let us remember the promises in the baptismal covenant that we will repeat in just a few minutes. They are all about our relationship with God and how that shapes our relationship with each other. It's good to be reminded of them, because we find it remarkably easy to forget. The good news is that no special garments are required, just the love of God and the love of neighbor, and for that, all God's people say "Amen!"