

Got Jesus? Now What?

October 15, 2017

Where is the Jesus we all know: loving, kind, giving, friend to all regardless of their status? This passage seems unduly cruel especially for the poor schmuck at the end, tossed out for not having trendy attire. C'mon Jesus! What gives?

When I first consulted my Oxford annotated Bible, it likened the last paragraph as a casual add-on, a parable about readiness that was tacked on years after its original writing. I, too, was ready to write it off until Pastor Bridget and I began talking about this sermon. We both felt that the last paragraph is not only meant to be included, it's the point of the whole story.

Fortunately, Jesus clearly states up front that this is a parable, a story representing life, but not a literal expose. We now have permission to let go of the word-for-word interpretation.

Jesus likens the story to a feast given by the king in honor of his son. The king draws up a list of carefully selected guests. All sorts of foods and wine are prepared. Decorations abound. Even a band is hired, but response is paltry.

When few show up, the king sends out his first search party. His slaves remind the invitees of the invitation. Many cite a myriad of reasons why they cannot come. Some excuses may be valid. Many probably are not.

The king tries again with little success. In fact, the second time around, some invitees kill the messengers. Talk about a hostile crowd!

The king has had enough. He sends out his armies for retribution. Take that for not coming to my banquet!

He tries one more time, only this time he tosses the guest list. He tells the slaves to forget the A list. Invite anyone to the banquet who will come. Doesn't matter who they are. We just want to fill this place.

No doubt the slaves probably advised everyone to come. After all, look what happened to those who were on the first list.

Success. People arrive and they all have a great time, eating, drinking, and dancing. These guests are really engaged and ready to party.

All but one. While making the rounds, the king comes upon one guy who stands out for his lack of suitable clothing. The king chastises him, demanding to know how he got in. This guy mumbles some sort of excuse, but it's not enough. The king tosses him out, not just out of the party, but to the pit: Hell, the eternal gnashing of teeth and sorrow. The king turns on his heel and admonishes the remaining guests, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Have you ever had an experience that changed your total outlook on life? Changed your routine and how you conducted yourself? Having children will certainly do that. Adopting a puppy puts your life on a new trajectory. It may be winning the lottery.

Sometimes it's an event outside of our control. It could be the death of a loved one or perhaps injury from an accident.

It can also be something very subtle, yet profound. When I graduated from tech school, I decided I wanted a new stove to celebrate my graduation. It was in the early years of our marriage. Bill and I marched into a local appliance store with our first credit card. The sales clerk flatly dismissed us. Credit denied. I was so humiliated I vowed I would never, never put myself in that situation again. It meant life changes.

Jesus talks about life changes in this parable, too. No stoves this time around. He's extending the offer of living in the realm, the kingdom, a life of incredible joy and abundance, sorrows and tears wiped away. All you need to do is say yes.

Well almost all. Remember the guy in the substandard wedding attire? He had said yes, but he was still thrown out of the party.

Sometimes we need to demonstrate our commitment with actions. Getting a puppy may begin with a trip to the Humane Society. For a fee you will have a bundle of fur and doggie kisses for life. But now the real work begins. Daily feeding and daily watering. Daily walking, most likely several times a day. Obedience classes. Visits to the vet for routine care and for that time your puppy decides to eat a pillow.

Forget the offers of help from your kids. You will be doing most of this yourself.

You get the idea. Agreeing to a new life and actually living it are two wildly different things. Imagine the changes when you decide to marry or to bring children into a family.

What changes was the underdressed wedding guest willing to make? Or, more importantly, what changes are we willing to make once we've accepted Jesus' call to come and see?

I would like you to think about this for a few minutes even to talk about it – right now and right here. I would like you to share your thoughts about what Jesus is calling you to do when he says, "Come and see." Take a few minutes right now to talk to the people next to you in the pew. There are many ways to serve Christ. This is your idea of what this means to you. Afterward, I would invite you to share some of your ideas of what come and see means in your own lives.

Just to get you started, I'll suggest attending the Living Gift Market upstairs immediately after the service. I'll bet many of you had already thought of that one.

So with that, take a few minutes to talk to the people next to you. What is Jesus calling you to do? You can talk now.

Pew and sanctuary discussion ensues.

Our commitment to serve God can take many forms. We've just scratched the surface in a few minutes of discussion. We will probably spend our entire lives committing to Christ many times over. After we spend our lives committing and serving Jesus, we, too, will join the feast in our finest wedding robes. Amen.

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