

**“Speed Limit”**  
**October 11, 2020**  
**Rev. Darcy Hawk**

**Matthew 22:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>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.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The story has been told that some among the citizens of a certain village have, in the past, crashed wedding receptions at the village inn. This passage from Matthew seems to justify their actions. If you pick the parable up and drop it down here and now it can take on meanings that might be far from the original intent of the story. Yet if we stay with the original intent what value can we derive from it. On the surface it’s a story of a somewhat insane ruler who treats the disrespect of his subjects in a particularly despotic manner. The next time he invites you to a wedding you had better RSVP yes, and check MyRegistry.com. Otherwise the father of the groom will send some men to rough you up, maybe even kill you. This outlook seems a bit bleak but, in light of what happened after Jesus spoke those words it had the power of prediction. Significant events overtook the early Church and changed it forever. Those events fall outside the New Testament however, they influenced the early interpretations of Jesus life and stories.

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In the year 70 a general rebellion of the people of Palestine was brutally put down by the Romans. Many died or were executed and the world in which Jesus operated was destroyed. A history of the time written by Josephus gives as a window into those events. In the face of human cruelty or the uncaring destruction of nature it's hard to hold onto the idea that God loves us. So the notion that God is a despotic dictator with a penchant for killing first and asking questions later has always haunted our faith. How can God love us in the face of a virus that randomly kills people who are already vulnerable? As our ancestors toddled from natural disaster to living under psychopathic leadership they had a hard time holding onto the idea of a loving God.

One method of preserving a loving God might be, “Hey, they were invited to the wedding banquet but chose not to come so whatever happens; it's their fault.” This response is an example of dropping then into now. Jesus was talking about his fellow Jewish people who had the prophets and lived with the Law of Moses still refused to accept an invitation to grace. Grace you say? This isn't about a punishing God but about responding to love. Weddings are surrounded by love and honoring human relationships. Who wouldn't want to celebrate love in a world that has so little of it? The nature of Jesus criticism is the essence of prophecy. It is like what your mother prophesized about you jumping off the garage roof with a towel for a cape. Persistence in certain behavior results in consequences. I believe Jesus foresaw the destruction of the world of Judaism in his time without appeal to supernatural means. Like your mom he saw where things were headed and what the expected Roman response would be.

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Had the people set aside their rabid nationalism and sought God those consequences might have been avoided.

If the world worked in such a strictly mathematical way we would all be personally responsible for what happens to us but the world is a study in competing outcomes. In this world my freedom ends where yours begins. The best we can hope for is that each of us stop contributing toward negative outcomes. Sometimes a community of well-behaved people may mitigate external acts of evil, sometimes the sum total of all the bad things people do comes back on those trying to do good. If all those who heard Jesus parable had turned toward God, gone to the wedding banquet, things in 70 AD could have evolved differently. For the penitent who heard and came they shared the same physical fate of those who refused the invitation but God’s love surrounded them, even bad outcomes are redeemed by a passing through death into life.

None of this is a free pass though. Without a change of clothes, read behavior, the evil keeps getting done so you might as well have stayed home. Freedom is never absolute, but we can be much freer than we think within the parameters set by God’s love.