

## **Fancy Dress Rejection!**

*Isaiah 25<sup>1-9</sup> Psalm 23; Philippians 4<sup>1-9</sup>; Matthew 22<sup>1-14</sup>*

*Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe. (Matthew 22<sup>12</sup>)*

One of my pet hates is having to go to a fancy-dress party! It may be because I wear fancy-dress most of the time, but it is the dreadful soul-searching that goes into deciding who or what you go as; whether you hire or make the costume; whether someone else will turn up in exactly the same thing; and then how long you have to suffer in it!

The parable of the wedding banquet we have just heard could be understood to be an over-reaction to how someone is dressed, but there is much more to it than that.

- ✦ Jesus is clearly exaggerating the story to make a point - that is what we need to understand. Jesus is a story teller - he is ensuring that the crowd understand the point!
- ✦ Who would ever refuse an invitation to a Royal Wedding? This was not just an opportunity for David Beckham to wear his OBE in Westminster Abbey, but an invitation to the bun fight too!
- ✦ We know that this is exaggerated - instead of just saying 'no', those who were invited literally killed the messenger! That was, as you might expect, the last thing they did! The problem was that the guest list was then diminished.
- ✦ To ensure that there were people there, the slaves were sent out and everyone **both good and bad** were invited - and in they trooped. Then things took a turn for the worse: **'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.'**
- ✦ It sounds so unfair - what could possibly justify this action, even by a monarch wanting to ensure that a Royal wedding went well? What is going on?

- ✦ The king was so upset because he would have provided what people were expected to wear - it was all part of the lavish expense associated with a royal wedding. The anger is not directed at the poor taste of the person wearing their own clothes, but it is a response to the rejection of hospitality.

Today, in this service of baptism, we celebrate the simple fact that Maedeh and Reece have accepted that simple invitation: they accept God's hospitality on his terms. They cloth themselves in the forgiveness offered in Jesus and in the humility of being disciples: for that reason they stay at God's table for ever! (If you need to know what that involves, that's what Paul is talking about:

**Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.)**

The difficulty comes when you think that your own fancy dress does and you would rather not accept his hospitality on his terms.

- ✦ You may live life by your own rules - but however much they are based on God's rules, you still set yourself up as knowing better than God: that is a fatal mistake. Few of us consistently live by our own standards and none of us know better than God.
- ✦ If you don't accept God's forgiveness, how will you find forgiveness? Can you ever be sure that others have forgiven you? Can you forgive yourself?

God doesn't force you to accept the 'clothing' of being a Christian - he simply responds to your rejection.

Our candidates will soon have to change their clothes - they could wear fancy dress if they like: it isn't how they appear to us that matters, it is what God sees! How do you appear to God?