

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

"The Undeniable Truth"

This parable from Jesus is an extremely hard one for some people. There are some people who want God to throw a large party which is open to everyone. Those people want to be "inclusive" – to let everyone in – no matter what. They don't want to hear about sin or judgement and they will quote Scripture saying, "doesn't God wipe away every tear from every eye? The truth is that those words have to be taken in the right context. Our first reading today from Isaiah 25, speaks similar words in verses 8 and 9, which are spoken as well in Revelation 21:4.

Let us look at the Isaiah text first. It is in your bulletin - *"The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."* (Isaiah 25:8-9) Please notice that the Lord will indeed wipe away tears, and we need to notice that these are people who have trusted in God – believing in Him, and are therefore glad in His salvation – His saving them from condemnation. And then there are the words from Revelation chapter 21, spoken to those who have entered into God's presence – meaning they are in heaven.

Now, let's look at John's words from Revelation 21:3-4 on page 1937 of your Pew Bible, *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is now among the people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* These people that John writes about are not people who have rejected God, but instead have gratefully accepted His invitation for those who believe in Jesus. You cannot take pieces of Scripture and make them say what you want – that is called 'eisegesis' – just picking it out as if with tweezers, and saying 'that will be my banner for today.' No, it does not work that way. We need to be doing 'exegesis' – or being exegetes, which is taking Scripture in the context intended – looking at verses before and after – and it may mean even having to read a page before and after and even more. Grant and I were having a conversation in my office before the service and this topic came up. It is very funny how God works on things for us. When I sent him the readings for today – including Psalm 23, he wrote back to me that he has been listening to Psalm 23 all week. Then he starts talking about eisegesis and exegesis – and I said, 'that is in my sermon,' We started laughing. God works that way all the time.

It is important to know that the parable in today's Holy Gospel comes right after the parable about the wicked tenants – who killed the vineyard owner's son. Jesus was driving His point home – with this parable and drawing a parallel to Himself. Many have been invited to a wedding – God's wedding party for His Son to all believers – but like the Temple leaders, now Jerusalem was refusing God's invitation as well. They would really get the message in 70AD when their precious Temple and all of Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans!

Everyone listening to Jesus would know what a story about a landowner with a vineyard was referring to; and everyone in Jesus' day would know the point of a story about a king throwing a wedding party for his son. Jesus' message is about the coming of God's kingdom, and in particular the arrival of His Messiah. The religious leaders of Jesus' day, and the many people who followed them, were like guests invited to a wedding – God's wedding party, the party he was throwing for his Son. But sadly, they had refused. God was planning the great party for which they had waited so long. The Messiah was right in front of them, and they did not want to know. They abused and killed the prophets who had tried to tell them about it, and the result was that their city would be destroyed. Because of their refusal - God sent out new messengers, to tell others to come to the party. And they came in droves. They were the tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the riffraff, the nobodies, the blind and lame, the people who thought they had been forgotten. They were thrilled that God's message was for them after all. But there was a difference between this wide-open invitation and the message so many people want to hear today!

They want to hear that everyone is all right exactly as they are; that God loves them just as they are and does not want them to change. They want to justify particular types of behavior, but I am sorry - that argument does not work! When the blind and lame came to Jesus, He did not say, 'You're all right just the way you are'. No, Jesus healed them. He made them walk, He made them see! They would not have been satisfied with anything less. When the prostitutes, tax collectors and extortioners came to Jesus - He did not say, 'You're all right just as you are.' His love reached them where they were, but His love refused to let them stay as they were. Their lives were transformed, healed, and changed. Think about this – Matthew – the one who brought us this Gospel – was a former tax collector – who was transformed by our Lord Jesus as living evidence of God's transforming love. God hates the behavior that they are doing and the effect it has on others – and on themselves, too. As a good and just God, He cannot allow that sort of behavior, and that sort of person, if they refuse to change. Change is necessary in order to remain forever in the party that He is throwing for His Son. That is the point of the end of the parable, with the man who did not change into wedding clothes – or “he came as he was.” He was bound and thrown outside where there was “*weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” You have heard me say time and time again – and Marilyn said to me this morning that I have heard you say this too many times – I don't think you can say this too many times, “God does love you just the way you are – BUT – He loves you too much to leave you that way!”

The point of the story is that Jesus is telling is the truth, the truth that political and religious leaders often like to hide – and instead try to cover with pluriform truth – saying that there is more than one truth – I have my truth and you have your truth – and can't we all get along. Instead of the truth that God's kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice, truth and mercy, holiness, and righteousness reign without impediment. THEY are the clothes you are supposed to put on. The robes of righteousness. When we die and go before God the King – he is not going to see us as we are – but instead He will see the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ, in whom we believe. You can take that to the bank! Those are the robes of righteousness

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that God has spoken about since the very beginning. They are the clothes that you receive when you accept Jesus. If you refuse to put them on, you are saying you do not want to stay at the party – and that you refuse to believe! That is the reality. If you remember how I stressed the words of Jesus last week in John 3:16-18 - I will repeat them again to remind us of the blessing of believing, and the consequences for refusing. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* Those are words that not everyone wants to hear – but they are the undeniable truth.