

# Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

## DINNER CONVERSATIONS

Matthew 22:1-14

### Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Jerome Burce

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 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." 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." 10 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. 11'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. 13 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." 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.'

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## DIAGNOSIS: Fools' Feast

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Dodging Dinner*

Bottom line: "They would not come" (v. 3); he would not wear the robe that was handed him (presumably) as he walked through the doors (v. 11). The key words are "would not." Didn't want to. No matter that the bash they've been invited or drawn to is the best and biggest ever. Sorry, "bashing along" just isn't their thing. It reminds one, sort of, of the invitees who dodge the mini-receptions for the King's Son that break out every Sunday at Any Corner Church ("Can't come—soccer practice, you know; my only day off.") Reminds one too of the many who make it through the doors without putting on their party hats; who, for example, will use the worship hour not to rejoice with saints but to critique them ("What's wrong with her back there, that she can't control her brats?" "Fifteen minutes of preaching and he's still not done?")

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Dissing the Host*

Behind the bottom line: "they made light of it" (v. 5), i.e. they treated the king's invitation as so much fluff. So much for their opinion of the king. Feared? Loved? Trusted? Not a chance. Reminds one, sort of, of attitudes in October '08 toward the lame-duck president of the U.S. (Were George and Laura to throw a party right now, would you break your neck to be there?) Reminds one too of how God is increasingly regarded in America as a lame-duck deity, too distant and removed from the urgencies of real life (cf. v. 5b) to bother with. As for the King's Son, why fuss over someone who gets treated even in his own churches as an effete princeling, a distraction at best from the real "business" (again, v. 5) of getting people to behave themselves?

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *"Out with you!"*

Rock bottom: “the king was enraged” (v. 7) and unleashed mayhem. In other words, dodging the king’s bash brought on a different kind of king’s bash. Nasty? You bet. Woe, therefore, to the king’s slave, a.k.a. God’s preacher, who dares to push the comparison (v. 2) of the story’s tyrant to heaven’s Lord. Today’s invited hearers will find such a preacher odious beyond words. They may not stone her. They’ll certainly cut her dead. Witty scoffers will chew her up and spit her out. They’ll mock as fiercely the God she represents, said God having failed our Western, 21st century “decent deity” test. Attend that God’s party? No way, no how, except (perhaps) in ironical garb, adorned here and there with a splash of sarcasm (cf. v. 11). At which, of course, the king sees red and the other bash begins—the “gnash” too, come to think of it (v. 13). Too bad for us. It’s cold out there, and dark; and it reeks of spoiled ox meat and congealed veal from that party we wouldn’t attend (v. 4).

## **PROGNOSIS: Lamb’s Feast**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *“Out with him!”*

Major mystery: “the wedding is ready,” says the king to his slaves (v. 8). How can this be? Remember, we’ve just suffered the jolting interlude of the king’s vengeance. The feast, presumably, has suffered it too—all those sauces turned sour, the bubbly gone flat, while the troops are out there doing their thing (v. 7) So this has got to be a brand new bash—but whence, and how? Whence too the revival in the king’s party mood? Enter at deep stage left the tale’s shadow figure, i.e. the king’s son, though even now we hardly see him. Instead we hear his voice, he being the storyteller, and the one whom the story will help to destroy (cf. 21:45, 22:15). What is Golgotha if not the place of outer darkness, complete with weeping and gnashing of teeth (27:33, 45-46)? How does he land there if not nailed “hand and foot” (v. 13)? Who drives him there if not the king who

refuses to “let this cup pass” (26:39)? What clothes is he wearing on his path to destruction? His own, not the king’s (27:31; cf. v. 12). Thus the king’s son as banished wedding guest; but if that, then also, in death, as those other guests on whom the king’s wrath fell. The king’s response? He raises this One from the dead and hands him “all authority” to “forgive sins” (28:18, 9:6), i.e. to crank up the party all over again.

#### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Digging the Host***

Now begins the fun: “those slaves...gathered all whom they found, both good and bad” (v. 10), among them, one guesses, some refugees from the ruined city (v. 7). So much for the standard assumption that seats at the king’s table are reserved for the behavioral elite. Gone too is the notion of God as yesterday’s lame-duck defender of an outdated status quo. This king is cutting-edge. Anyone serious about the future will want a piece of his company. In other words, they’ll believe in him, their faith signaled by the joy, laughter, and applause that attends their presence at Any Corner’s weekly warm-up celebrations, and also by the share they contribute to the king’s surprising move of kicking open the doors to all regardless of record or merit. These folks don’t “make light” (v. 5) of the king and his invitation. Instead they draw light from it.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Pushing the Feast***

New bottom line: “those slaves went out into the streets” (v. 10), only these days the ones pounding the pavement turn out to be erstwhile guests who are spreading the word of a party worth attending. Turns out that the Lamb’s High Feast really is a blast, at least at their tables where all eyes are fixed on the king’s son; or if on each other, then merely for the sake of admiring the outfits of praise and thanksgiving that the king’s son has arrayed them in. Where else, they say, is the food so good or the company so fine? And saying it, they find themselves

transformed from those who “would not come” (v. 3) into those who can’t be stayed from going (cf. 28:19)—to tell a friend, a neighbor, that the king’s bash is the best. Mere fantasy, you say? Not at all. There are churches—a chosen few? (v. 14)—where this happens as a matter of course. God grant that there be more of them.