

Psalm 106

¹ Praise the LORD!

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?

³ Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.

⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you deliver them;

⁵ that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory in your heritage.

⁶ Both we and our ancestors have sinned;
we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.

¹⁹ They made a calf at Horeb
and worshiped a cast image.

²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God^[a]
for the image of an ox that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²² wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.^[b]

²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

Matthew The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 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, mistreated 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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The Ivory Coast, in West Africa is a land with extreme poverty (the annual per capita income for the Ivory Coast is \$650). Yet it is home to a ginormous cathedral. Considered by many to be nothing more than a vanity project of their tyrannical president.

The Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro is listed in Guinness World Records *as the largest church in the world*, surpassing the previous record holder.

There are about 350 who regularly worship there but--- *there's room for 18,000!*

It was built, but nobody comes. Almost nobody, anyway.

The big, empty church in Africa is not exactly the same as the situation in our text. But it reminds us of it. In our text we have a king hosting a wedding party. It's not a big church the king is building, but, rather, a huge, mother-of-all-parties he's building, or throwing.

And no one wants to come. It looks like his banquet hall is going to be empty!

This is a story of Hospitality offered. Of an invitation -----and it is a story of in-gratitude and gratitude on the part of those invited

God is always inviting us to come: come home, come to the banquet, come to an abundant life, come to eternal life, come to worship, come to God himself.

In this story, the king (God) is excited about his banquet. The custodian has given everything and extra polish. The calf has been fattened and slaughtered, the wine has aged, the tables are set, the DJ and band have been hired. And God is really jazzed about the feast. God can't wait to get the invitations out. God is just that way.

It's just the way God is. This is the God we love, worship and serve -- a God who invites us to the dance, invites us to be a part of what God is doing.

God has made preparations for the feast, God wants everyone to be present to honor the Son and his bride ... God is not willing for any to miss this even

God is always inviting. Every day is an invitation.

But what, exactly, is God inviting us to? What's in this invitation?

- An invitation to service (Matthew 28:19)
- An invitation to an abundant life (John 10:10)
- An invitation to worship (Psalm 100)
- An invitation to eternal life (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 10:13)
- An invitation to enjoy the presence of Jesus (Revelation 3:20)
- An invitation to experience rest (Matthew 11:28)
- An invitation to pray (Philippians 4:6)
- An invitation to turn to God in time of need (Jeremiah 33:3)

Let's look at the people who are invited to the banquet. We start with a story from Martin Marty: who shared a story he'd heard from a Jesuit priest. The priest told him how, on a visit to Mexico, he happened to observe young families coming up to the cathedral on a Sunday morning. As each man approached the church doors, he handed his wife or girlfriend through the door, then took his place outside among the other men. This group of men stood, smoking cigarettes, on the steps of the cathedral until their loved ones emerged from the cool

darkness within.

The priest decided he had to address the situation. He walked out through the church door and into the sunlit plaza.

"Good morning, gentlemen."

"Good morning, Father."

"I see you escort the ladies to Mass, then wait outside."

"That's right."

"You don't go into the cathedral yourselves?"

"No, not generally."

"Well, that's puzzling. Aren't you Catholics?"

"Of course we're Catholics," one said. "But we're not fanatics."

Perhaps this was the problem with the people the king invites to his banquet. Refusing the invitation while still claiming entitlement to be part of God's people. Or perhaps it was ignorance or more likely false pride.

Whatever their motivation faced with hospitality, invited to the party they show no gratitude or appreciation .

Who are these people? To begin, this invite goes out to *everyone*. To not get to the party, one has to reject the invitation. If you're not at the party, it's not for want of an invitation. For now, everybody who's somebody gets an invitation. Even if you're not a somebody, but a nobody -- you get an invitation. It's a general invite to the people of the realm.

The invitation is treated casually by some. This is the wedding of the

king's son! This is the event of the decade! This is huge! And you're going to treat this invite with nonchalance and even hostility?

What could be more important than an invitation to this event?

The King/God is enraged at their in-gratitude. Can they not see the hospitality being offered? Do they feel so entitled, these guests who were too busy, too concerned with their own agendas, too interested in their own self-interest?

So the King invites others. The text says that the king's servants "went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests" (v. 10). So before we start making judgments about those who deserve to be on the guest list, let's remember that it's only by God's grace and mercy that we ourselves are included among that number!

This parable is also about salvation. Jesus makes this clear in his contrast between being at the feast, within the kingdom, and being cast into outer darkness. It is a story about God's anger with human entitlement, the human desire to feel 'deserving' rather than blessed, and about the generosity of true salvation by God's grace.

The invitees should also remember that they cannot *expect to come to the party dressed in their own clothes*. There is a dress code and the host provides the wardrobe. This is a reference to the fellow who was bounced from the party because he didn't read the dress code.

The Bible is clear that when we stand before God we need to be dressed in the garments of a righteousness that belongs not to

ourselves, but to Jesus Christ himself. Our garments are like filthy rags. "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth" (Isaiah 64:6). The apostle Paul says that he is willing to give up anything in order to "be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith" (Philippians 3:9).

To sum up:

- God invites us in spite of our background.
- God invites us without respect to our level of education.
- God invites us without regard to our bank account.
- God invites us without regard to our race or gender.

A huge cathedral in Africa stands virtually empty. A tribute to human folly.

Meanwhile, God is building something for us. God is building a future for us. God is building a present for us. God is inviting us to come to his banquet, to be present in what God is doing.

The last thing we would want to do is to treat such an opportunity casually, indifferently or even with hostility.

No, we want to show our gratitude and RSVP in the most rejoicing terms possible.

"Yes, God, I accept your invitation. Party of one (1)." Amen.