

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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This parable is hard to digest. If you are like me you find yourself cringing at every turn of what should have been a straightforward wedding party.

It's important to remember that this parable is actually a response to a question. Jesus is responding to religious leaders who had asked him, "By what authority do you do these things." By "these things" they are referring to the clearing of the money changers in the temple, as well as the healing sick and stigmatized individuals at the temple.

You see, Jesus is speaking to a group of religious leaders that didn't quite see how Jesus' commitment to the poor and marginalized was part of God's plan.

They hadn't always included or invited EVERYONE to God's banquet. They hadn't always accepted the invitation to a banquet where the poor and marginalized are also present. Or In a society where hosts traditionally provided wedding robes to all their guests to create an environment of equality, the religious leaders may have been the ones to have shown up without the robe- in their OWN fancy tux and ties, shaming the poor individuals who had just been gathered in off the street.

The religious authorities questioning Jesus STRUGGLED to align their professed love of God and efforts to maintain temple life with God's vision of equality and dignity for ALL people.

Like these authorities questioning Jesus, Even the most studious seminary students and most admired religious leaders of today can also struggle to enact God's radical vision for equality and equity in the world.

Today our Hymn of the Day was commissioned by the late Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador. NOW he known for his solidarity with the poor, but it wasn't always that way. When he was appointed Archbishop in the 80s, his colleagues were confident that he wouldn't make any waves in the midst of a civil war between the wealthy military and business families and the low wage farmers.

And at first, he DID NOT make a concerted effort to stand on the side of the farmers. He DID NOT recognize that a deep participation in God's vision of equality at God's banquet, would compel him to show up and put on the wedding robe- and stand in solidarity with the poor- as he eventually did.

If you are like me, when it comes to enacting God's vision of equality at God's Banquet, we too do not always INVITE and then PROTECT the poorest people in our communities. Society tells us to do the opposite. To advance *ourselves* and to stand out as better and brighter, but NOT to look around, to put on the wedding robe, and to see if EVERYONE has what they need.

While society tells us one thing, scripture is full of a different vision of how to live. And whenever there is a banquet in scripture, it often points us to that vision.

Banquets show up throughout the Bible to represent God's abundance and provision. In the Isaiah text today, the banquet table is used to paint a picture of how God would provide in the face of hardship. It was a promise of equality and restoration for displaced and defeated people.

With this parable, told centuries later, the Israelites are no longer in exile and Jesus uses this traditional imagery of the banquet to challenge assumptions about one's place and privilege at God's banquet when they may no longer be aligned with God's vision for equality and inclusion of ALL people at that banquet.

If the temple leaders were listening closely, they would hear that by following Jesus' example and these "things" that they accuse him of doing, and aligning their lives with equality and justice for their neighbors most in need, they can participate even MORE FULLY in God's vision for the world.

Oscar Romero understood this about God's banquet- or God's vision for the world—when one of his close friends and fellow priests, Rutillio Grande, was murdered. Previously he hadn't gotten too involved in the protests of farm workers, But with his friends death, Romero's faith and life was forever re-oriented to the poor and struggling workers of El Salvador.

Whereas he already had been a priest for years and had accepted the invitation to God's feast, his understanding of God's vision for the world was deepened when

he started meeting with, protesting with, and ministering to the farmworkers of El Salvador.

Romero's life, the hymn he commissioned based on his experiences ("Let Us Go Now to the Banquet") and the parable of the wedding banquet remind us that WE TOO can more fully participate in God's banquet table of radical equality in a way that we more FULLY comprehend the gift of God's abundant grace.

While we receive God's grace through baptism and Gods BANQUET table of communion on Sundays- our *understanding* of God's love and *experience* of God's grace deepens when we, join in the mission of Christ as we go out into the world, enacting God's banquet of justice and equality for all, as we become the body of Christ given for the world.

As we sing, as we partake in Christ's body and blood given for us and as we go into the week to enact God's vision for the world, may we be reminded of the radical nature of God's banquet table- to which we come and which we join with Christ in creating in the world - where ALL are welcome. And where we go **together** in justice and love.

AMEN.