

What if I cannot afford a new outfit?

Attending a Wedding can be an expensive business. As a guest you may be expected to pay to stay somewhere near the venue and somehow you have to get there.

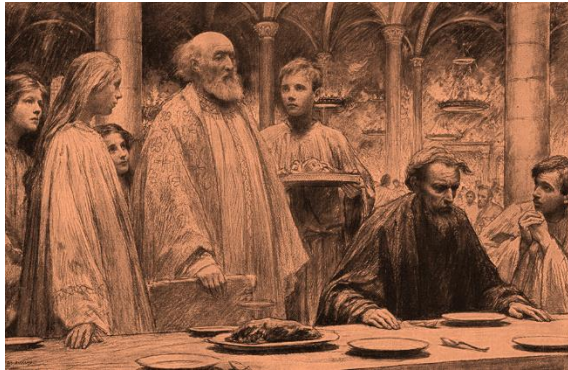
Even if the wine flows at the reception there are those incidental costs for a cup of tea, a soft drink, or a bag of crisps, all charged at eye-watering prices.

Then there is the question of what you might wear; even men are expected to turn up in something more than that comfortable jacket they wear in the shed.

What about a present?

It was all so much simpler in the olden days.

When we hear this Sunday's Gospel about the king and his son's wedding feast, most of us go to the bottom line. In this case it means that silent guest not wearing a wedding garment.



To explain what is going on, we may be told that everyone was provided with something to wear and the man spotted by the king has refused to put on what was offered.

As such, this would be a case of sheer ingratitude and refusing to share in the spirit of the event. It would be like turning up at the reception; pigging out on the grub, downing any free drinks, but then refusing to toast the bride and groom. Such a person would deserve being asked to leave.

There may be truth in this interpretation, but it is worth pausing and asking if that is what was intended when the parable was first heard.

Jesus told a story about the kingdom of heaven. He used a traditional image of marriage as a model for the relationship between God and his people.

The first problem in the tale was that those originally invited did not come. They found something more interesting to do. It would be like declining an invitation because 'the hedge needs trimming' or the clichéd 'washing my hair'. Worse than that, some turned on the messengers, even killing them.

Having punished the ungrateful perpetrators the king decided to invite another group of guests, everyone else.

The most unlikely individuals: bystanders, idlers, poor people, the sick and the lame are all helped, and encouraged to come to the feast.

Here is an important part of the story. The new partygoers were not the kind of people to be invited to a royal reception.

We pause and think how this relates to the Kingdom and the Banquet of Heaven.

None of the new guests are the kind of people you would expect. It is to make me think about my invitation. It is more than having no right to be there because a guest has no legal standing to demand entry.

It is something to do with me recognising that I am not the kind of person who would normally be part of such an occasion. My invitation is miraculous and surprising.





In this I recognise that I am not invited because of my charm, my after-dinner repartee or because I would be an ornament to a glittering gathering. I am invited because God chooses to be kind to me.

We are familiar with the idea that God loves us and cares for us. We say it many times.

In repeating this truth there is the possibility of complacency. Why worry about the rights and wrongs of my actions, or the thoughts that fill my mind or the words that sully my tongue?

God will forgive me, he is indulgent, he delights in me. I only have to look cute and adorable and he will come running.

It is what used to be referred to as the sin of presumption.

God says that we can rely on him, so I will do what I like and rely on his patience.

The twist in the tail of the parable that Jesus told brings me up sharp. The king spotted a guest not prepared to join in the spirit of the occasion. Everybody else had come along, so why shouldn't he?

As so often with the parables, Jesus gives us this final bit so that we do not sit back and think the story is about other people.

It would be all too easy to look down on the first set of guests – even making the mistake of identifying real life groups and peoples and thinking that they get what they deserve. All too tragically such a lazy way of thinking led to the persecution of the Jews and the vilification of innocent people.

I can never presume that I have an invitation to the Banquet of Heaven and insofar as I, and all humanity, receive one it should lead me to humble gratitude and a determination to be on my best behaviour.

