

## **“Festooned for a Fancy Feast”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
October 15, 2023 - Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 23

[Exodus 32:1-14; Matthew 22:1-14](#)

Yesterday, here in this room, we remembered and celebrated the life of long-time church member Bob Clark. It was good to have a full room here in the sanctuary, with over 100 people being here to give God thanks for Bob’s life and to support Judy and her family as they grieve his loss. Those of us who came wore garb appropriate to the occasion, and I noticed that one of Bob’s younger family members, who was wearing a dark suit during the memorial service and collation, had switched clothes as the reception was ending, taking off his black suit and tie, which were very appropriate for the occasion, and wearing instead a red soccer uniform, shin pads, and cleated shoes as he was going right from the church to compete in a soccer game. I was glad to see that he was able to support both his family and his team and that he didn’t mix up his attire for the two very different events.

This made me think of our scripture lesson from Matthew about the parable of the wedding banquet, in which a king throws and lavish feast for his son’s wedding, to which none of those who were fortunate to be invited actually come. So the king welcomes instead of these especially selected but ungrateful and unworthy guests all the town’s people, including the good ones and those who might be considered the bad ones. No matter who they are, good or bad, they are invited, and so the banquet hall becomes full with these once excluded but now included guests, wearing the appropriate wedding feast attire and ready for the party...all, that is, except for one person who did not come to the banquet dressed and ready for the occasion, like a soccer player showing up on the field for the big game wearing a suit and tie rather than a soccer uniform and cleats. And so, this ill-attired and unprepared guest, who was once-excluded but now included but doesn’t show the king gratitude or respect by either showing up with the right wedding clothes or providing an explanation or excuse to the king when asked, demonstrates an unwillingness to actually participate in the feast as expected and is cast out of the party, where there was not joyous munching on wedding cake but weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The parable follows the one we read last Sunday about the wicked tenants, and joins with it Matthew's gospel in being offered initially to Jerusalem's religious leaders as a warning to them about what really matters to God, who in today's allegorical parable is the ruler and host of the wedding banquet. The religious leaders are represented in the story by the first batch of invited guests who declined to come to the feast. The king's response of destroying their city very likely refers to the Romans destroying Jerusalem, its temple, and its religious leadership in the year 70 CE. And the second batch of invitees, the people of the town, both good and bad, refers to the people of all kinds, Jews and gentiles, devout religious folk and those considered by the religious to be outsiders, all of whom are shown by God an extravagant welcome and generous hospitality, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey, if they will just come in to enjoy the banquet, but come in prepared, festooned for the fancy feast.

So how do we respond to God's call for us to come in and participate in the party? Will we be like the religious leaders, who didn't even bother to respond to God's invitation, perhaps because we're too busy following the rules of our own making or trying to impose them upon others? Or will we gratefully accept the invitation, leaving behind our wild parties of idol-worshipping and law-breaking, like the one we read about in our lesson from Exodus, to join instead the joyous celebration of vow-making? Will we show up ready to party? And what will we wear?

Fortunately, we have a style guide. In the New Testament epistle to the Colossians, we are taught to "clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience;" to "bear with one another and...forgive each other;" and above all, to "clothe [ourselves] with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:12-14).

And so, at our baptisms and all the moments after them when we gather together to remember and celebrate the grace of God, we should come wearing the party clothes of love. Love is the right outfit to wear whenever we walk down the red carpet here in the sanctuary to gather for worship. Love is proper garment to put on to go out and about in the community. Love is the robe that we are to wrap around ourselves when relaxing out in our homes. Love is to be the uniform we wear, day in and day out, and it is the garment that we are called to share. Love is a comforting shawl that we drape upon the shoulders of grieving or hurting

friends, and love is a jacket we can give to warm the hearts of those who are chilled by loneliness, anxiety, or feelings of emptiness, worthlessness, or aimlessness.

So let us love. In a broken world, in which so many people idolize themselves and worship idols of their own religions, families, and family traditions, let us seek instead to faithfully worship alone the God of love by loving our neighbors. Instead of offering hostility, let us show hospitality. Instead of enacting wrath, let us extend mercy. May more of God's peace be in our war-weary world, and may the giving of that life-giving gift of peace begin with each of us today. Amen.