



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

October 9, 2011: Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Walter Wink

RCL: Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14
LM: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20;
Matthew 22:1-14 or 22:1-10

[Note: Walter Wink's reflection for this week focuses exclusively on the Gospel passages]

There are three extant versions of this Gospel parable of the Wedding Banquet. Matthew's is clearly the most modified. Neither Luke 14:16-24 nor the Gospel of Thomas (henceforth GT) 64:1 knows anything about a king giving a marriage feast. Luke treats it as a great banquet, and GT as merely the meal required to feed visitors. Luke and GT depict the invited guests as making flimsy excuses to jilt the host, whereas Matthew slights the excuses and in their place spins an allegory in which the king's subjects not only refuse to come when invited but also kill the servants sent to invite them. In verse 7 Matthew abandons the guise of allegory for a straight-out historical allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in the Jewish War of 66 C.E. Obviously, Jesus couldn't have spoken these words some 40 to 60 years after his death.

Matthew then adds a brief warning to wear the requisite wedding garment, and the punishments in store for those who do not. Here we encounter Matthew's signature warnings: "cast him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 13). Luke and GT know nothing of this threat. Almost all the references to eternal fires, torments, and tortures in the afterlife appear in Matthew's Gospel, and often when Matthew mentions them, Mark, Luke, and GT do not. So Matthew's version appears to be furthest from the original.

But Luke also has a few elements that don't suggest early tradition. Verses 21b-23a seem repetitious and added to provide an allusion to the Gentile mission. As such it is redundant. If we set aside those verses, we have something pretty close to what may have been the original.

GT is preoccupied with the excuses, which he makes more elaborate and refined. Consistent with that interest, GT has added a fourth excuse. Those who jilt the host are in every case wealthy men of great importance. Their refusal to attend would have been a deliberate act of humiliation. The host would have to have done something serious to warrant such treatment. GT ends the parable with a didactic slam: "Buyers and merchants will not enter the places of my Father."

So the odds are that the Lukan version is the most original, minus the verses indicated. But what is the point?



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Matthew explicitly states that this is a parable of the reign of God. But what is that reign? It is a new order of power that turns the pyramid of power upside down. That paradox is revealed here as God having a preferential option for those who are unemployed, hungry, destitute, and marginal. To quote Luke precisely, these are “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (v. 21), a phrase Luke himself has added to make clear who can come to the dinner.

In societies like first-century Palestine, there was a very flimsy safety net, made up mostly of alms that were inadequate to provide enough calories for one person, much less a family. People literally died on the streets (Luke’s story of Lazarus and the rich man in 16:19-31 is a case in point). The unemployed dropped through the copious rips in the net, and many would rapidly succumb to starvation and its related diseases.

It is these, the hungry people, who are invited to the feast. Metaphorically, that feast is the presence and coming of God into this world. But metaphorical feasts are never satisfying unless everyone is fed at a literal feast. Jesus is saying that there is abundance if only it is shared. Shockingly, there are many who will have nothing to do with this feast and refuse to attend. There is food enough for all, but not the will to share. Bread for the World’s mission is to see that the bread is shared. In the face of widespread starvation, hunger, and homelessness even in the developed nations, we must be careful to see that the literal feast precedes the figurative feast.

More personally, we might make a list of excuses that keep us from feasting. On one side, ask yourself: “What are the preoccupations that so fill my life that I have no time for the feast?” On the other side, “What is the poverty, brokenness, or infirmity by virtue of which I may be brought to the feast?”

Children’s Time

Written by Larry Hollar

Ask the children how many have ever gone to a meal where there were lots of people present. These may have been family picnics, wedding receptions, birthday parties, or other events. We often call these feasts, and they’re a time for celebration and rejoicing. Sometimes when we’re invited to a feast we have to say no because we already have other plans. But in our story today, we’re reminded that God welcomes all of us, whether we’re poor or rich, young or old, to the wonderful feast God has ready for us. And like God, we’re also to welcome others to share food around our own tables so that all God’s people can be fed, each day. What a joyous feast!



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Musical Suggestions
Prepared by Larry Hollar

Lord of Feasting and of Hunger-BP 141
Now the Feast and Celebration-GC 742
As We Gather at Your Table-FWS 2268
Now We Join in Celebration-LBW 203
You Satisfy the Hungry Heart-PH 521
Praise and Thanksgiving-CC 764

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year A
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