

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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PROPER

why it isn't about their Sunday's best

by Drew Downs

Jesus tells a parable about a wedding that people don't bother to show up at and one of them isn't properly dressed for the occasion. We might assume Jesus thinks we need a dress code or use this to complain about how people don't know how to dress up anymore, drawing on nostalgia for a time when people had a Sunday suit or dress that would elevate their appearance for such a special occasion as church, a funeral, or a wedding. That isn't it.

Jesus doesn't intend for us to see the clothes as the point, but the commitment. Because the invitation is about inclusion, to become within the beloved community. It isn't so much a uniform required to be worn or else, but a manifestation of participation in something more than ourselves. It is about the desire to participate, to be changed by this holy community, and to wear those very commitments on our bodies. It isn't about freedom from, but freedom in.

ORDINARY TIME

2026

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Golden Idols

Last week's reading from Exodus was the giving of the Law in what we know as the Ten Commandments. The lectionary jumps forward a significant twelve chapters for this week, to a story of confusion and disappointment. All of those chapters are about the Law, with God geeking out about dimensions of the Temple and how awesome things are going to be when they finally get to where they're going. Imagine how excited God is, how exiliating this is for Moses, how high they're flying and God is like, oh, man, look at the time! We've been at this for weeks! We need to check on the people. And they go back down to find . . .

The people, feeling abandoned and scared, go back to old ways. They don't trust that God actually does have their backs (despite all of the evidence). But it isn't rational, right? They're scared. So they do what they are used to doing. Which is flirting with a bunch of gods and making idols to them . . .

Aaron, the priest, is stuck in a lose/lose situation. He needs to deal pastorally with his people. And trust in God. But, as is usually the case, the people are closer. And they're demanding (and did I mention they're scared?). So as they melt down gold to make a giant idol, Aaron finds a compromise, putting an altar in front, as if to say, this isn't blasphemy, they're really praying to God . . .

The whole thing is tragic and sad. It is also too easy to affix blame to any one figure. It's fear and nostalgia and distrust and balancing egos and altogether so very familiar. Because this is church. And Moses avoids the temptation to take it all to his benefit. To start over with God. He saves the people. Unworthy and unrepentant. Perhaps that, too, can be church.

With love,
Drew+

ORDINARY TIME

2026

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 23A

October 11, 2026

Collect

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to the people in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 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.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' 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.

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. 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.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

This is a third parable in a row Jesus has told the Temple leaders which seems to indict them for their response to God's mission with God's people. He has talked about authority and obedience as laborers in the vineyard. Now he's comparing them to ungrateful guests. And these leaders are getting fed up with getting called out.

One of the questions that regularly comes up in reading these parables (and the ones that follow in chapters 24 and 25) is what to do with a God whose response is to cut these people off. And I recognize that "it's complicated and a rhetorical device" isn't the most reassuring response to such a serious question. These parables, while making the Temple leaders look monstrous, do so with an equally monstrous response. And perhaps we take the last parable Jesus tells to his disciples before entering Jerusalem as the contrast. In that one, Jesus is comparing the kingdom of heaven to a vineyard with a landowner continuously going into town to collect laborers and paying them all a day's wage. And underneath that is the hint of contempt for other landowners who aren't doing the same, leaving people to starve to death. Jesus is speaking to a radically inclusive kingdom of heaven in which everyone is invited and everyone is free and treated fairly. And now, Jesus is talking to people who are acting like the other landowners in that earlier parable who are rejecting God's invitation.

This is also why we should refrain from taking such a parable as suggesting that part of the mission is to reject and demonize rather than acknowledge this as consequence. A consequence, we should note, that reflects the leaders' own words in response to the previous parable: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." In short, this is a parable tailored to them; not just in the way it is told, but in the substance of the telling. These are people who are rejecting the invitations over and over. So Jesus puts the consequences in terms the leaders know and ask for! In the same way that they are choosing their own separation from God, they are asking for their own dismissal from kingdom of heaven.

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