

## No excuses

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O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers  
of your people who call upon you;  
and grant that they may both perceive and know  
what things they ought to do,  
and also have the grace and power  
faithfully to fulfil them.

My text today is from the Matthew's gospel chapter 22 and verse 13, 'And he was speechless'.

Are you ever lost for words ? Have you found yourself in a situation where you are literally speechless ? Well you won't be surprised if your preacher today and your priest for the past five years says to you that rarely am I lost for words. Words are my profession. I've spent a lifetime devoted to the study and teaching of English; I've written a book, I write poetry and I edit our monthly Newsletter. Words are what I do and without the Word, how could I be your priest ?

Yet here we are today when a man, a guest at a royal wedding is literally speechless. His predicament is odd; his situation fascinating. But more of him anon. First we need to unpick the parable of the Wedding banquet which is today's gospel reading from St Matthew.

'The Parable of the Wedding Banquet' or 'the Marriage Feast' as the Authorised Version terms it, is to be found in both the gospel of St Matthew and St Luke (14 15 - 24) and I have to say that I prefer Luke's version. Luke's is shorter, the excuses more interesting and there is none of the violence and harshness that Matthew contains.

That said, it is important to note that the wedding banquet or feast to which folk are being invited is in fact an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. The king doing the inviting is none other than God; and the Son in whose honour the feast is being given is, of course, none other than Jesus Christ our Lord. To accept an invitation, therefore, is to accept that Jesus is Lord and that he is the true and only Son of the Father, the Lord our God. And rejection is precisely that !

Then, there are the excuses. The excuses in Luke are much better, more human, more plausible and I even find myself sympathising with the third chap who has an excellent reason for not coming out to play. But Matthew says that the invites were simply ignored or treated with contempt: one went to work on his farm; another went about his business; a third group abused the messengers even going to the length of killing them ! Matthew locates the parable late in his gospel; Jesus is already in Jerusalem in the week running up to Passover. His death is on the cards and as such the parable tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus' fate awaits him as it did the prophets before him whom the people rejected, ignored and sometimes killed.

Matthew's parable is very much centred on the Jews' rejection of their Messiah and the awful fate awaiting those who turn down the chance to feast in the Kingdom of God – i.e. to be cast out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth – whereas Luke is more focussed on the Gentiles, non-Jews who will be invited in to take their place in the kingdom at the very seats the Jews have chosen to vacate.

But what of the man who is speechless? Who is he? What is he? Why is he lost for words? We don't know his name, hence he can stand as a representative of a type of person rather than being an individual in his own right. He is clearly a wedding guest invited to the feast but unlike the other wedding guests, he is not dressed for a party. Why not? Perhaps he's too poor to afford the clothes necessary to meet the particular dress code the occasion requires? But here the parable needs clarification because at that time, it was the duty of the host to provide suitable dress for those attending who could not themselves provide the necessary garments from their own wardrobe. So for this man not to be wearing the proper clothes was a deliberate choice, a deliberate act of non-compliance, a deliberate decision that puts him on a par with those others earlier in the parable who have refused to come. This man has been forced to come but it is against his will and his refusal to wear the right clothes is a clear sign he does not want to be there. So unsurprisingly he is ejected.

It is harsh stuff and I admit I'm not comfortable with the God I love, a God of love and compassion, rejecting anyone. But I believe that though our God rejects no

one, we can reject him and the man is speechless because having rejected God, there is nothing more to be said.

But I pray that when stand in the presence of God we have the grace to echo the words of recognition and acceptance which St Thomas uttered in the presence of Jesus Christ risen from the grave – ‘**My Lord and my God**’.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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H: Sermon 24: No excuses

