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*Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October – The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity*

*Readings: Exodus 32:1-14 & Matthew 22:1-14*

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## **Exodus 32:1-14**

### **The golden calf**

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’

Aaron answered them, ‘Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.’ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, ‘Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.’ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

‘I have seen these people,’ the Lord said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.’

But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God. ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their

inheritance for ever.” Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

## Matthew 22:1-14

### The parable of the wedding banquet

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

‘Then he sent some more servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

‘But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

‘Then he said to his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and 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 wedding clothes. He asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?” The man was speechless.

‘Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

‘For many are invited, but few are chosen.’

## Reflection

My background research showed me that Bible teachers argue over whether this passage is one or two parables? *For our purposes it doesn't matter!*

Jesus' parables were not about whether the story was an actual event (i.e. did the wedding really happen?) *but rather what does it mean?*

Some preachers go into details like: ‘The king was God, the son was Jesus, the guests...’etc. *But we can miss the point by explaining everything!*

Let's seek to contextualise this parable and understand its meaning for us today.

### **To whom was the parable directed?**

Answer: The Pharisees and religious leaders. The last verses of the previous chapter provided the context: *“When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realised he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.”* Matthew 21:45-46.

### **Understanding Jewish weddings in the time of Jesus.**

In Jewish society, the parents of the betrothed couple drew up a marriage contract. The bride and groom would meet, perhaps for the first time, to sign the contract. The couple were considered married at this point, but they would separate until the actual day of the wedding. The bride would remain with her parents, and the groom would leave to prepare their home. At this point invitations would be sent out.

All this could take time. When the home was ready, the groom would return for his bride, often without warning! A second invitation was sent out with guests expected to respond straight away. The wedding banquet was one of most joyous occasions in Jewish life and could last for up to a week.

### **It was about accepting an invitation.**

In the parable those who had been invited to the banquet refused to come. In the culture of the day this refusal to attend was one of the highest insults possible. It was not because the invited guests *could not* attend, it was because they *would not* come.

A new invitation was extended, this time open to all! It was offered to any one they could find on the street corners, good and bad alike. In no time the banquet hall was full of guests.

### **It’s not about how ‘good’ we are, it’s about how good God is!**

But one man had not bothered to wear the *provided* wedding garment. Yet another insult to the host and he was quickly removed from the feast. He obviously thought his ordinary clothes were good enough. This is like those people who think they are good enough and don’t need the righteous ‘clothing’ provided by God, through Jesus dying on the cross.

Our salvation does not depend on anything we can do, but on what God *has* done!

## **Have we accepted God's invitation?**

God is an invitation-giving God – he invites us and awaits our response. To be invited is to belong – our names are on the list. To be invited is to be of value – if we don't reply we will be missed.

God invites us to be in relationship with him. Some people enter without knocking, but not Jesus! He knocks and waits: *"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."* Revelation 3:20.

### **A prayer:**

Lord, thanks for knocking.

Thanks for respecting my boundaries.

And thanks for knocking persistently.

It takes me a while to respond  
because my doors have many locks.

Give me the courage today  
to open the doors of my life.

Amen.

Peter Sanderson