



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  

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Diocese of Chelmsford

## **The Wedding Feast and the King Enthroned on the Cross**

Readings:

*Isaiah 25.1-9; Philippians 4.1-9; Matthew 22.1-14*

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2026

The Venerable Sue Lucas

A wedding is a joyful thing; a celebration of love, and of two families coming together. And an excuse for a party! So it is unsurprising that the image of God's just Kingdom in the Hebrew scriptures is a wedding feast – a feast for all peoples of rich food and well matured wine, rich food filled with marrow, mature wine strained clean, as Isaiah has it.

The prophets of the Hebrew scriptures though, are to say the least, ambivalent about kings; God permits them to continue as kings, so long as they protect the weak, the poor, the widow and the orphan; the prophets understood so well the temptation of authority hollowed out by absolute power, power that forgets that there is one true King, and one true judge who, as in Matthew's Gospel a few chapters later (Matthew 25) whose touchstone of judgement is doing justice and loving kindness, particularly towards the most vulnerable.

This parable comes in a series, in which Jesus confronts the Jerusalem religious elite – and particularly the Herodians, whose religious authority has, precisely, been hollowed out to become naked political power – as their support for the Herods gives them the backing of Rome. These escalating confrontations will, of course, eventually lead to the events of the passion. Ironically, Matthew's Gospel may well have been written in the wake of that enterprise in holding on to power coming to a brutal end, with the defeat of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple, built by Herod, in 70AD.

To the Herodians, like any ruling dynasty, marriage was an important means of holding on to power by making advantageous alliances; and a lavish wedding feast was a good way of putting economic power on display.

But Herod was not popular with the elite of Jerusalem; so it may be that what Jesus is doing here is a piece of sharp satire – the King here is not God, but Herod – and the response of the Jerusalem elite is rude, to say the least – as each invited guest in turn suddenly finds they have more pressing business. Some even take the opportunity to rough up a couple of his slaves.

The enraged response of the King is an entirely plausible response of a puppet-king of the Roman Empire, of a dictator dangerously in awe of his own importance. He sends in the troops – and he destroys the city. And then, he displays his power by holding the wedding feast with those who have little choice but to come.

The drama increases, when he notices someone without the proper clothes. This detail comes into sharp focus when we realise that, in first-century Judaea, the custom was for guests to be given a wedding garment; this unfortunate man has refused the clothes of Herod, so is cast out, bound hand and foot.

It is after this particularly biting satire, that Matthew goes on to say that 'the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said.' (22.15) And no wonder! For Jesus points to the one true King, who is God, and to the one true Kingdom, whose signs are justice, righteousness, kindness, compassion and love. It is that King with whom Jesus claims rightful

identity, not in power or pomp or posturing, but in the moments of the most extreme vulnerability, in his trial before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, when he is handed over to become the King enthroned on the Cross. For in confronting the hollowed out authority of the naked power of Rome and its allies, Jesus eschews the one thing the powerful cannot relinquish – power itself, and so utterly defeats those structures – not with revenge or violence, but with the relentless love of God.

And the King enthroned on the Cross, is, of course, also the true Bridegroom of the wedding feast; the one who becomes present with us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and so nourishes us, his very body the Church, with the rich food and mature wine of his body and blood.

We are so nourished that we might become more like what we consume; that, with him we learn to let go of our own temptations of hollowed out authority when it becomes naked power. And in doing so, we are reminded that all those structures in our own world that also do so, and that tear and divide humanity and destroy creation are under judgement, are not inevitable or without limit, however powerful and inevitable they seem.

Instead, we learn, as the church, to ‘rejoice in the Lord always,’ even in the hardest of places and to keep on doing the things we have learned from him; who has fed us with rich food and nourished us with mature wine, and who clothes us with the cloak of righteousness and the garments of salvation, that the Good News of his Kingdom of righteousness, justice and kindness might be just a little bit more visible. Amen.