



October 15th

THE NEW SHOFAR

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love,
a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

- 1 Peter 3:8

The parable warns Christians not to be lukewarm

In today's parable Matthew is making a point both about Jesus' authority in relation to the temple leaders as well as his community's significance in relation to the synagogues that had rejected them and their message. Those woes first began to emerge with the destruction of the temple in 70AD. From that point onwards, the Jewish-Christian sect began to differentiate itself more and more from the Jewish traditions and faced more and more persecution from the Rabbis. In this parable, Matthew is arguing that his Jesus-following community, despite the alienation they may feel in the present by temple authorities, are now themselves the inheritors of the invitation and promise of God. Our own communities today are not facing the same alienation as those of Matthew's Church, but there are some important messages can be found for believers today.

The day is coming when judgment will be carried out by God in Christ

Firstly, the harshness of this parable can be a little off-putting to the present-day faithful who prefer to think of their Jesus being gentle, meek, and mild. However, there is something about the violence and intensity of this parable that shakes us up and may remind us that we are participating in not just our personal or even communal stories. No. We are key actors in God's story of bringing all things to an End in Him.

This is an important and affirming insight from Matthew: What we do as people of faith **matters**. Life is not meaningless. It is not without purpose. It truly matters and the way we live our faith is of great significance, not just for ourselves, but it also for those whose lives intersect with ours. It is so easy these days to compartmentalize the various parts of our life, particularly our faith life. We check "going to church" off the to-do list, considering it to be one of the many things we must do that day, that week.

Here is the tragic bit: our faith lives can all too often be the one thing we can skip out on when the calendar is too full. If we were to miss a meal, a feast, an important occasion, or perhaps we have to leave early to go somewhere but we do not experience repercussions. God does not smite us! Not yet any way. What this scenario can do is assist us in reflecting on the importance of God in our lives.

God does not want to "fit in" - God must be the immovable foundation

It is too easy to set our priorities and "fit" Church in; if there is nothing else demanding our time and resources. Of all those things battling for a piece of our time and commitments why is it that our responsibilities towards God is the easiest one to drop off our list? The one that most easily falls to the wayside. There is always something

demanding a priority place. This explains the intensity of the anger of Jesus.

God does not like being dumped for something or someone else. The excuses of those invited to the party are all valid, seem reasonable and most of us have used them in one form or another in our lives as disciples. It is the way Jesus warns us of the harsh consequences of failing to find time time for church, or a prayer, or a moment of reading the Bible. God has a sense of minimum requirements for entry into the End Time festivities and one of them is obedience. For Jesus this means doing God's will, not just believing in God. Here is the real kicker: In other words, attending to our faith lives, our relationship with God, and our communities has implications for life after the grave. We have accepted the gifts that come with discipleship, it does not sound reasonable then for God to expect fruit for all he has given us.

A faith that does not bring about ongoing change is not a faith at all

Secondly, this parable insists that our faith ought to make a difference in the way we live our lives. At first read, the last part of the parable (found only in Matthew) does not seem to make a whole lot of sense. One of the last-minute invitees, recruited off the streets, shows up not wearing a wedding robe. The king notices this and inquires: *Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?* When the mis-dressed guest is literally speechless in reply, the King commands that the attendant *Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* How was the guest supposed to know he needed to pack a wedding robe? After all, he was never given an invitation with RSVP and dress requirements.

Here Matthew is bringing us into the world of allegory. The “wedding garment” symbolizes the Christian life that we “put on.” This language is used in **Galatians 3:27** where the community is told, *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* And this image is unpacked in **Colossians 3:12**: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.* In other words, Jesus is setting out a kind of pathway to a life of faithfulness and so a life of eternity around the divine throne. According to him, **there is an expectation that being a Christian, a Jesus-follower, will make a difference and be obvious in the way we live our lives.**

Here we have an expectation of Jesus that we all need to live lives that do not just prioritize our credal faith. *Christian living must be lived out* in such a way that others become curious about the transforming power of a living God evident in our own lives; so that they desire what we have. The world must experience the living Christ in us and through us. We are called to be living as disciples, bring the Good News to the ends of the earth by the way we live. This has been a constant proclamation of Jesus since the time he began his ministry and they were among his final words when he was taken up into heaven – *be my witnesses no just to Jerusalem and Judea but to the ends of the earth.*

God wants us to be with him for eternity – we are precious to God

Finally, this parable reminds us of God's broad, persistent, and generous invitation. In

this parable, God/the king does not desire to party alone. Is that not a magnificent revelation!!! God wants to celebrate with us for eternity. This is why he has given us so much. It explains his patience and persistence. For all of our funny and sometimes sad and distressing ways, God want to party with us.

Many are called *but* few are chosen

The last words of the parable are the words that are probably the most difficult for many people, but they make perfect sense in this context. Jesus says, "***For many are called, but few are chosen.***" What does this mean? In the parable, those who were invited were called to come to the feast. But the king did not choose them. Why not? Because they rejected the king. They did not value the king and his son enough to glorify him. They failed in the basic social norms of a party invitation and the dress required.

Then, we read about someone who accepted the invite but showed up wearing the wrong clothing. Again, this person was *called* but ***not chosen***. The king rejected them too because they failed to honour the king and change clothes as they were supposed to.

Thus we see how many are called, but few are chosen because few give the king the honour and glory that he deserves. Many seek their own glory, and many don't care enough about honouring the king to change. They have mighty and important things happening in their lives and God is the one to miss out. They fail to see the tremendous opportunity they have been given, and they fail to take advantage of God's graces that come with accepting that call. They have been invited, and they have accepted the invitation. But they just show up for the food. They do not appear to care about the king. They do not want to be a part of the festivities. They just want to *be* served.

Why are there so few who are chosen?

The reason is simple in this parable at least. Because few want to pay the price! Jesus says in another place that the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, therefore few choose this way. (**Matthew 7:13-14**) The reason it is hard is that we have to give up the priorities this world: Our egotism, our own ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings, our own will, our own desires. We have to bear the cost of putting something off so that we can serve and honour God first and then, with the graces that come with that service, transform the way we do the other things staking a claim on us. We do this in order to be completely obedient to the leading of the Master.

Making sure you are chosen

Peter writes in **2 Peter 1:10**: "*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure ...*" How do we do that? By doing the things that he writes just previous to that in **verses 5-8**: "*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Responding to the results of the referendum

Whatever of the results of yesterday's election, we Christians have a responsibility to model the kind of peace God alone can bring. For some it will be a painful time and they will find it hard not to resort to verbal slings and arrows to be thrown at the "other side". The issue has already divided us as a nation, in families and even amongst our brothers and sisters in Christ. But now more than ever, we must stand out from the reset by witnessing the Way of the Kingdom.

Jesus himself prepared us for this moment and we would do well to be reminded of his thoughts on division and anger... "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." (Jn 17:20-23)

Humans are good on divisions – only God can truly unite us

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. This is a truth we profess every time we recite the Creed. Given the obvious divisions among Christian Churches and denominations, and even within individual parishes and faith communities, it is worth pondering: In what does enduring oneness consist?

The simplest answer is that the Church is one by virtue of our one baptism, and the one Christ into whom we are baptized. Ultimately, the unity of the Church is the unity of Christ Himself. For this reason, division in the Church is always a wound in the Body of Christ. Thus exists an urgent imperative to do all we can to put unity before individual victories. To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from the very beginning.

In the face of issues raised leading up to the referendum

Whoever it is wins the vote, we need to remind ourselves of our moral responsibilities for all of our brothers and sisters in need, as all are created in the image and likeness of God. All have been given salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus who died for all that sins may be forgiven. All sins.

We all have an innate human dignity no one can take away one everyone must respect. Our common humanity requires that we respect and uphold the dignity of each and every human being. All our other rights and responsibilities flow from this dignity. This principle is deemed as the central aspect of our Church's social teaching. The idea that each life has value is universal, inviolable and inalienable.

Let us then work intentionally with all peoples, for building unity in Christ so that we are bound together with the armoury of peace.