

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

An inclusive kingdom of heaven

A recent Gospel for the day, [Matthew 22:1-14](#), got me thinking about the kingdom of heaven. Apparently, the writer of Matthew's Gospel had learned from Jesus a very different concept of the kingdom of heaven from that previously understood in the Jewish religious law and social community. The writer of Matthew's Gospel is very intent upon having us think in new and inclusive ways about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in 32 different ways. You know them, but here are a few examples:

- "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field" (Matthew 13:24).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field" (Matthew 13:31).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast" (Matthew 13:33).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field" (Matthew 13:44).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls" (Matthew 13:45).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea" (Matthew 13:47).

Why does Jesus describe the kingdom of heaven in so many different ways? I believe it is because he wants to expand our thinking about it. He wants to give us new images, new ideas about what the kingdom of heaven is like. He wants us to realize that the kingdom of heaven is much more than what we think it is.

In the Matthew 22 parable about a wedding feast, Jesus is talking to the chief priests and elders who knew the details of the religious laws and rituals and the social boundaries of the time. Jesus seems to be challenging them to stretch their thinking. They (and we) are given two important issues to consider: Who are the acceptable people to the king? And where does the king choose to be with his new guests during the feast?



First, the king sends an invitation to those of his own social class, those from the wealthier class and those who knew and kept the religious laws of the time. Rudely, the chosen guests embarrass him by not accepting his invitation. In fact, they are hostile to his invitation.

However, their actions do not prevent the feast. The feast is ready. Instead, the king opens his doors to everyone, to all the people, poor or rich, both to those who knew the religious laws and those who did not.

The king is not only changing the social order by inviting surprising guests who ordinarily would not be welcomed, he is also violating the norms by coming to sit down with the new guests — whether they know the religious laws or not. The king's radical action in this parable shows he cares more about the people than the religious laws and

social boundaries of the time.

I believe Jesus is giving us a transformed image of God in this parable of the wedding feast. God welcomes all into the wedding feast and comes to be with them. God's love is bigger than the law. We are not able to say who God's chosen people are and who are not.

As I watched the recent TV reports of Hurricane Harvey crawling up into the Houston area and flooding the city

with water, I had an idea of how Jesus might have used this hurricane to give an example of the kingdom of heaven and who might end up being the guests at the wedding feast.

As the storm seemed to overwhelm Houston, the TV reporters gradually began to focus on how ordinary people began helping others.

There were pictures of those trapped because they were told not to evacuate or because they were unable to go: those who are handicapped, elderly, or without transportation. Then, look who shows up.

Ordinary neighbors come in motorboats or rowboats and move the trapped people to safety. I remember seeing a man with a big smile on his face being interviewed. He said, "This is what Texans do: help Texans." These good neighbors courageously used what they had to help their community in need.

Might Jesus say of this situation that the kingdom of heaven is like a city overwhelmed with water? The first

who come to help are the local neighbors — some white, some Hispanic, and some African-American. They get in their boats and search for those in need. He would say, "These people who come to help others are my guests."

By giving us so many definitions of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus invites us into new ways of thinking about who we are and how we live our lives as God's people. He shows us what we need to do to become God's guest and emphasizes how really close God is to us in the kingdom of heaven.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

Sr. Laura and Sisters

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Coming Soon

Advent web calendar

The holidays are approaching and we are presenting a new Advent calendar for this year's holiday season. It will appear on our website December 3. This year our special focus will be on Mary who is the Mother of the Lord. She is the perfect disciple who listened and carried out God's plan. Advent calendar at: <http://srsclare.com/advent-2017>

Sisters of St. Clare

4875 Shattuck Rd • Saginaw, MI 48603

Phone: 989-797-0593 • Web: <http://srsclare.com> • Facebook: SistersofStClare

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