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**Sunday 15 October 2023 to**

**Sunday 22 October 2023**

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**An invitation you can’t refuse**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***For many are invited, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).***

[Read Matthew 22:1–14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A1%E2%80%9314&version=ESV)

Let’s face it – weddings can be a drag.

The fact that, in Jesus’ parable, the invitees to the prince’s wedding don’t want to come to the banquet resonates deeply in the 21st century. Be honest, like me, you’ve been to a wedding that is entirely about the photos. Or there is the professionally created video montage of a beautifully decorated bridal party placed in awkward poses with just the perfect lighting. The rest of the invitees engage in multiple hours of polite, if not painful, conversation with long-lost relatives or semi-inebriated friends of the bridal party.

I might be sounding curmudgeon-ish, but to me, that’s the way the invited guests sound in Jesus’ parable.

Maybe one invitee asks another, ‘Are you going to the king’s banquet?’

The reply: ‘I thought about it, but the big game is on Saturday night. Oh, and I promised my spouse I would clean the boat this weekend. On Sunday, the kids have a birthday party to attend and …’

‘I know’, says the first. ‘It’s just one more thing … We’re just too busy.’

As the invitees do everything in their power to avoid attending the banquet (including killing the king’s servants), Jesus ends this parable with, ‘Many are invited, but few are chosen’.

In the 21st century, theologically, we might understand this parable is directed to the Jews who choose not to come to the king’s party and the Gentiles who are given the next go. In the 1st century, though, no one would turn down the invite. Thus, it’s a strange moral of the story. It feels like it should read, ‘Many are invited, but few accept’. Right? But chosen?

When someone is chosen, they are selected for a purpose or mission. Perhaps the invitation to the kingdom of heaven is an invitation to participate in God’s banquet celebrating Jesus’ love for the entire world. Perhaps Christians have been chosen to serve rather than simply attend.

What does your invitation look like? Are you too busy? What do you think you have been invited and chosen to do?

**King of the banquet, thank you for the invitation to celebrate and participate in Jesus’s work of bringing about the kingdom of heaven. Amen.**

Reid Matthias is the school pastor at St Andrews Lutheran College in Tallebudgera, Queensland. Reid is married to Christine, who is part of the Grow Ministries team. Together, they have raised three incredible daughters, Elsa, Josephine and Greta. Dedicated to the written word, Reid has recently published his fourth novel, Blank Spaces, maintains the blog [*ireid.blogspot.com*](https://ireid.blogspot.com/) and regularly contributes to The Lutheran magazine.

Monday 16 October 2023

**Saving kids**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***Everything is possible for the one who believes (Mark 9:23b).***

Read [Mark 9:14–29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A14-29&version=NRSVUE)

How often have we heard the plea from a parent, ‘Can someone *please* help my child’? The grief and pain of a parent who scans the crowds for someone – anyone at all – to ease the pain of our children who are cast into the fires of social media confusion or drowned in the waters of online activity.

The father in our Scripture is desperate for someone to *act* on behalf of his son, but predictably, those in charge (the teachers of the law) are *discussing* with the other nine disciples. We don’t exactly know what was said but can only assume that they were scoffing to the disciples, ‘You claim the power of your rabbi, but you can’t even heal a child’.

All the hot air wasted on arguing about the issue rather than fixing it …

Enter Jesus, perhaps still glowing from the Transfiguration. The crowd rushed to him, overwhelmed and in awe. ‘The spirit keeps driving him into the depths of the fire and water. If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’

The father’s response is not simply about healing his son but restoring the family.

Help *us*.

Jesus gives the most hopeful response – one for the 1st and 21st centuries. ‘Everything is possible for the one who believes.’

No *some*things, or a *few* things, but *every*thing.

But the caveat is – they’re *possible*, not promised. For this father and his son, the father’s belief brings about immediate change through Jesus’ power, but sometimes the possibility is in the future. Sometimes, that thing we are desperate for doesn’t come in the form we expect (or even want). How does a Christian deal with this? How does a believing person, who prays and fasts, wrestle with an answer that resounds with ‘later’?

What things in life do you struggle with? How do you hear the words of Jesus as possible and promise-ful, especially when it comes to kids?

***Lord Jesus, help us. We know you have the power to rescue. You have promised that belief will lead me through. I pray that you give me the patience to wait for your answer. Amen.***

Tuesday 17 October 2023

**The problem of ego**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us (Mark 9:39b,40).***

Read [Mark 9:30–41](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A30-41&version=NRSVUE)

Each segment of this brief Bible passage could fill an entire novel.

There are three parts:

1. Jesus tells the disciples what kind of lengths he will go to for the redemption of humanity. They have no idea what he is talking about, and they do not have the courage to appear silly by asking.
2. As they walk through Galilee, the disciples are intent on figuring out which one of them is the best. When Jesus questions them about it, they seem too embarrassed to respond.
3. Somewhat ironically, the disciples *actually* notice someone driving out demons in Jesus’ name. Weirdly (or perhaps not), they stop that person because they are not one of the in-group of the twelve.

What do all three of these have in common? Ego.

Jesus gives the disciples the good news straight up, yet their egos hold them back from asking the next question, which would give them more clarity. What does this mean for us?

Despite Jesus’ description of selfless servanthood, they argue about replacement royalty for when Jesus dies.

In what should be a moment of rejoicing, the disciples would rather be *right* than *helpful.* Like Pharisees constantly nitpicking Jesus about the Sabbath or cleanliness laws, the disciples make the same mistake.

In each of these three issues, the core of the problem is a Garden of Eden one: ego – wanting to be like God.

Fortunately, the patience and graciousness of Jesus help the disciples encounter the true mission of God’s transformation power in humanity and encapsulate it in the words he has already spoken. ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me’ (Mark 8:34).

***Heavenly Father, give me the strength to deny my own need to be selfish and turn my will over to you, who will use all things for good. Amen.***

Wednesday 18 October 2023

**Tripping hazards**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42).***

Read [Mark 9:42–50](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A42-50&version=NRSVUE)

My sinful, cynical nature rears up against this passage because it speaks so strongly to me and this present age of celebrity. As I work with these ‘little ones’ – sometimes they are kids, other times adults young and innocent in the faith – my temptation can be to be the ‘cool old guy’ or the pastor who gets the accolades. What is at risk is putting myself in the place of the Saviour who the little ones really need. I can very much be the stumbling block because of what I write with my hands, the places where I’ve been or the ways in which I’m viewed. Because of my fallibility, I can skew how people see Jesus.

Not me, but Thee, as they say.

If you have a chance to keep reading around this chapter of Mark, notice how many times Jesus interacts with children or speaks about them. He even goes so far as to describe to the adults, ‘Truly I tell, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’ (Mark 10:15).

I find the Lord’s perspective entirely refreshing. With child-like hearts, minds and eyes, we see the Saviour pointing to God instead of our own hands, feet and eyes, which causes us to stumble in faith. We are given the opportunity to entirely direct our attention on Jesus, who will not stumble, nor will he let us fall.

What kinds of things cause you to stumble in your faith? How do others see this? Most importantly, I pray that you know Jesus’ forgiveness in these things.

***Precious Lord, grant me the wisdom to do and speak the things that bring glory to you, not me. When I stumble, please lift me up again to walk with you. Amen.***

Thursday 19 October 2023

**Hold your peace**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate (Mark 10:9).***

Read [Mark 10:1–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A1-16&version=NRSVUE)

It used to be that in wedding ceremonies, the pastor would pause and ask a question of those in attendance, ‘Does anyone have any reason to object to this marriage? Speak now or forever hold your peace.’ Despite what you might believe about Hollywood and its droll wedding movies, the reason these words were spoken at weddings has nothing to do with another suitor standing at the back of the church, lovestruck, banging on the doors to proclaim their interrupting vows of affection for the bride or groom. No, the reality is much different. In ancient Christian ceremonies, the question of objection was asked to make sure that neither the bride nor the groom was married to anyone else. For the three Sundays prior to the marriage, the question was asked at worship just in case. Why was this? Because when God brings two things together, no one should separate them.

We don’t ask the question at weddings anymore because it’s unnecessary. But the reason is still incredibly relevant because when God brings people together, we should hold our peace or – more importantly – give it to them. For me, the Scripture is obviously about marriage but also about relationships in general. As God brings people together – friendships, families, working partnerships – separating them is a result of hardened hearts.

Instead, as people were bringing little children to Jesus for him to bless them, he said, ‘Be like these kids. God’s kingdom belongs to people like them’. In general, kids are soft-hearted, malleable, inquisitive and desire relationships above all else. Be like them, Jesus says, because in that mindset (not infantile behaviour, mind you), you get to see all the great things God has joined together for good.

Who are people in your life with whom God has connected you?

Feel free to drop them a line of encouragement and appreciation today.

***Heavenly Father, bless me with a soft heart and open my eyes to your goodness in the world. Help me to appreciate the amazing people you have blessed me with. Amen.***

Friday 20 October 2023

**Talk about impossible**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With humankind this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God’ (Mark 10:27).***

Read [Mark 10:17–31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+10%3A17-31&version=NRSVUE)

For all intents and purposes, this prostrate man was the ideal of what ‘good’ people sought to be. He knew the commandments. Even more, it reads like he kept them. He was financially successful; perhaps he had a nice nest egg stashed away for retirement or even a second house for weekend getaways. He epitomised the kind of blessings we hope for in life: health, wealth and security.

Yet he still asks the question, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

From an earthly perspective, he had what all people desired. But he wanted it all. And he wanted to earn it. ‘What must I *do*?’

We know people like this, right? If I’m honest, this is me, too. Yet Jesus doesn’t chastise him. Instead, he looks at him and loves him. The loving thing for Jesus to do was to hold up a mirror to the thing that was blocking the man from experiencing *everything* that God had for him.

CS Lewis says it best in *Mere Christianity*, ‘Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you get neither’.

If it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, it feels impossible for me, too. ‘Who then can be saved?’ I echo the disciples’ question.

I’m not sure what Jesus’ expression was at that moment, but I feel like a wry smile might have crossed his lips. ‘You can’t save yourself, but God can.’ Rich or poor, joyful or downhearted, saint and sinner – the good news of the Bible is that God’s saving love in Jesus is not just probably or possible, but it is assured! Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. You know the song! With God, all things can be done.

***Gracious God, help me to hear your good news and be changed. Because of your great love for the world, you gave Jesus to make life eternal assured. Help me live in a way that reflects your sacrificial love to the world. Amen.***

Saturday 21 October 2023

**Let them be**

by Pastor Reid Matthias

***Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it (Psalm 96:11).***

Read [Psalm 96](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+96&version=NRSVUE)

In four stanzas, the psalmist encapsulates a life of immensity, from recognising God’s power among the nations and giving voice to it through song to all creation erupting with praise.

If there was a psalm I’d recommend reading every day and then putting it into practice, it’s this one.

Command one: sing!

Sometimes when I ask people if they sing, they put a hand to their chest and say, ‘Me? I don’t sing’. This statement is ridiculous. Everybody sings. Not everyone sings in tune, but everyone sings. God doesn’t command that your new song will go straight to the top of the Billboard charts. Just sing your song of praise to the God who is worthy of praise.

Command two: ascribe and worship!

‘Ascribe’ is not generally used in common conversation, but it means ‘to regard a quality belonging to someone or something else’. In other words, tell about the qualities of God that we can’t possibly have. ‘Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.”’ That’s enough.

Command three: let!

In the last stanza of Psalm 96, we find this ‘churchy’ verb ‘let’ appear. It’s the same command that God speaks as creation explodes into reality. Let there be light. Let there be a vault. Let the water ... I always read it as if God is giving permission for something amazing and supernatural to happen. In Psalm 96, the command is for creation to sing again. Let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad. Let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let all creation rejoice before the Lord!

Perhaps today is the day for you to sing, ascribe and hear all the great things God is doing in the world!

***Creator of heaven and earth, you are majestic and glorious. Great are your astounding works. Help me to rejoice and be glad in them today. Amen.***

Sunday 22 October 2023

**Integrity**

by Georgie Schuster

***Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no-one, for you do not regard people with partiality (Matthew 22:16).***

[Read Matthew 22:15–22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A15%E2%80%9322&version=NRSV)

Here we go again… Another showdown.

On one side we have disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians, intent on ensnaring Jesus with a web of words. On the other, we have Jesus, seeing right through their ploy to the very hearts of those seeking his capture.

And yet, the words spoken as a means to flatter Jesus are not only true, but the way Jesus used to brush ‘the web’ away!

Jesus is indeed a man of uncompromising integrity. He isn’t buffeted by the influence of others when they miss the mark. Jesus’ foundation is truth.

Jesus is secure in his identity as God’s beloved Son. While on earth, he lived in the confines of humanity and obeyed the laws of the land. And yet he never lost sight of the fact that everything belonged (and belongs) to God (Psalm 24:1,2).  Jesus’ eternal perspective kept him grounded.

In a world that at times weaves webs of confusion, we too can stand on truth, secure in our identity in Christ, knowing who we are and who we belong to. Knowing this, what truth from God can you hold on to today that will help you clear away those webs?

***Dear Jesus, you are the way, the truth and the life. There are times when life gets loud and confusing. Help me remember my identity is in you. You are my anchor. In your name I pray, Amen.***

*Georgie lives in Adelaide. She loves getting out into the country to experience God’s creation. She likes taking photos when she can. After teaching for many years, she now enjoys working in a church/ school setting when she still gets to share stories about Jesus with children and families.*