I wonder if any of you, like me, have vivid dreams?

Dreams that you remember in startling detail
days and even weeks later?

My dreaming life has often been a source of much amusement for my colleagues.

They say that when you are dreaming,
your subconscious is sifting and sorting through the events of your waking life and filing stuff away.

Dreams that follow any kind of theme can reveal a lot about what is going on in the subterranean mind.

Barbara Brown Taylor,
refers to Matthew’s take on the parable of the feast
as having a dream like quality.

I might add nightmarish.

The way that Matthew has shaped this parable
reflects something of what was going on in his subterranean mind.
Or, more correctly, what was going on
in Matthew’s context.

“For Matthew violence is evidently
a necessary component of the story.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Why? Because Matthew and
the community for which his gospel was written
were likely caught up in a fierce conflict
with local Jewish religious authorities.

Let’s break it down. Round One.

The A-list invites.

They ignore the first round of invites and
make obvious excuses like the one my dad used to use
“I’m washing my hair that day”.

And then – because this is a nightmare parable –
they kill the messenger.

The king – quite rightly – is very cross about this.
And so he embarks on a campaign of
massive retaliation.

The reference to the king vanquishing his people
and burning the city might therefore
reflect Matthew’s belief
that the destruction of Jerusalem,
which had happened about 10 years before he wrote,
was God’s punishment for the rejection of Jesus.

This is difficult stuff, make no mistake.

But there’s still a wedding to be organised.

So the king then moves to the B and C List, and
– dispensing with tradition –
invites everyone to the wedding. **Everyone**.
The good the bad and the ugly.

Finally there is a party to be had. A big party at that.

And just when we are rejoicing at
the baddies getting their comeuppance,
and the underdogs getting a fancy dinner
we meet the imposter.

The guy without the wedding robe
helping himself to the hors d’oeuvres.

What is that about?

Nobody really knows.

There’s lots of theories.
I read something this week that piqued my interest.

Robert Farrar Capon, notes that we can assume
the guests are given the proper attire by the King
upon arriving at the wedding.
For surely, the good, the bad and the ugly
out and about and minding their own business
would not **just happen** to have a wedding garment
stashed somewhere on the person.

Instead, Capon suggests that the King threw open not just the doors to the banquet hall
but also the doors to his wardrobe
and provided the have-nots and rejects
with an outfit fit for royalty.

Nothing is expected of the guests.
Except that they receive the king’s hospitality.

But when the King glances around the banquet hall –filled to the brim with B and C list guests –
one man stands out.
He is so utterly out of place
that the King rushes over and accosts him.

*“Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?* And he was speechless.”

Capon suggests something very helpful here.

He says that the man who was speechless
had **no good reason** to be without a wedding garment, but he had **some bad reasons**.

He could have been part of the A list of guests and didn’t want to lower himself to wear the King’s second-hand wedding garment.

He could have been with the B and C list of guests
but refused to conform to the King’s charity.

He even could have been a wedding-crasher,
who was hoping to blend in.

The likelihood is that if the imposter had said
**anything at all** to put himself
in relationship with the King, he would have been fine.

Instead, he was there for the food.

It was a transaction.

Based on the previous behavior of the King,
it can be assumed that the King would have
engaged the man and welcomed him in.

But the man was speechless; he said nothing.

All the reassurances the king might have given him remain unheard and the man is thrown into the outer darkness.

And judgement has the last word, falling like a thunderclap on the refusal of grace.

It would seem that accepting God’s invitation
into relationship is accepting the invitation
to be transformed.

Transformed into the very likeness of Jesus.

To be clothed in the garment of Christ.

And whenever, in defiance of what my faith might teach
I resolutely refuse to grow in generosity
to love my neighbours
and choose instead retain a hardness of heart,
that is like turning up at the feast without a robe.

Accepting God’s grace and rejecting transformation
are mutually exclusive.

You can’t go to a party in your daggy clothes.

Well thanks be to God that
conversion is not a one-time event.
It happens again and again.
On an almost daily basis.

And this story reminds us that

God is a persistent pursuer of humanity,
seeking again and again to
invite us to the party.

That God invites the most unlikely and unqualified
of characters to be part of the feast.

The good and the bad we’re told.

That covers you and me.

The mathematics of God’s grace is based on
the principle of “the more the merrier”.

And so despite the violence and retribution
actually this story is also
a tale about true love.

The true love of a God for a people.

The love that was exemplified in the life of Jesus.

Love that is not transactional
but transformative.
If only we will accept the invitation.

1. Richard E Spalding, *Feasting on the Word,* 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)