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The Wedding That Went Sideways Fast

Today is the Chicago Marathon, one of my favorite days of the year. I'm not running it this year but I always wish I was. FOMO. (Fear of Missing Out)

It's so popular now that you have to put your name into a lottery. Over 200,000 apply to run the race, but they only choose about 50,000. For the last three years I have gotten the "thanks for trying but you didn't make it" email. Oh how we know what it's like to receive that kind of news. Not only for fun things. News that you didn't get the job or the invite. News that a feeling of love was not reciprocated or a friendship was one sided.

News that clearly places us outside of where we wish we could be. How have you felt this?

Our world is filled with stark divisions of insiders and outsiders a thousand times over. Those who have it and those who don't. From elementary school gym class beyond. Those who get picked and those who get left. Those who got the invitation and those who just watch while others enjoy and run the race we wish was ours.

In Isaiah that division is clear and decisive. The vision we know so well is soaring. A quick look at the first verses we read and those following that get left out of the lectionary reveal something more complicated. While some feast on well aged wine and rich food on top of the mountain, those nearby are brought to a heap of rubble. At the bottom of the mountain, maybe even within ear shot of the party, the moabites are trampled down into manure, laid low, and brought to dust. Insiders and Outsiders. Where are we in this split screen?

This episode leads into Matthew. This week's parable is even more violent and disturbing than last week. The wedding goes sideways fast. Let's recap. First, those invited to the wedding ignore the invitation, and after a second urging to join they refuse. Some go on their way while others kill the servants who handed them the invitation. Then the one who is throwing the banquet murders those people that killed the other people. The servants who are still alive now go out and gather all kinds of people to join the celebration because the food is getting cold. Everything is fine until someone who was brought there by someone else to fill the seats apparently doesn't have the right clothes and gets 'Bound hand and foot, and thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' It's hard to enjoy the banquet while someone is getting murdered at the next table. What's going on?

Any banquet or wedding or feast or party has insiders and outsiders. Our best efforts at creating a table for all come up short. That is just the way things work in our world marked by sin and death, division and conflict, and all the ways we set ourselves against others. Someone has to manage the guest list. Yet where are we in these episodes? Maybe we've been all kinds of characters at different times. Sometimes the insiders, sometimes the outsiders.

I know for me - Just as I know what it is like to be on the outside looking in, I also know what it is like to defend my spot at the table once I finally get in even if just through a crack in the door. To protect and defend and use my credentials to justify the fact that I belong while being suspicious of others. Just a taste of being an insider can be intoxicating.

We often do our best to explain why some people should be left at the bottom of the mountain or justify why someone should be thrown out even if we are still waiting to get in. Our normal way of operating in the world is "who do we have to kick out or silence so the banquet will finally be set up the way that we want or to keep it the way it is because it's fine for me." Stark divisions between insiders and outsiders play right into our own sinful schemes.

ICE detentions are at an all time high. Those in charge are doing this by detaining people at schools, hospitals, and court houses. That's the way systems of violence and oppression operate. Supposedly some people must be thrown out so we can protect some warped notion of insiders and outsiders. When we scapegoat outsiders things turn ugly fast. How quickly we forget the parable we just read.

Where is Jesus in all this? Remember who is at the bottom of the mountain in Isaiah? The Moabites. Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus which includes Ruth- who was a Moabite. Down amid the destruction are some ancestors of Jesus. And the one bound and cast out for not being dressed right? Who is that if not the one who always comes to us from the outside. Despised. Rejected. Forsaken. Alongside the ones thrown out or not invited at all. His whole life is spent not wearing the proper clothes to satisfy those robed in power and status. Refusing the garments of empire and exclusion and scarcity and violence. Fully revealed on a cursed tree, between thieves giving away forgiveness with his last breath. Revealing again the futility and emptiness of all systems that glorify retribution and revenge and death.

This is the God who meets us in our own outer darkness and will gather all who are cast aside and catch all those who fall. The one who stands with those who never make the cut. This God chooses those the world passes over. This one will not lose any of God's

beloved- including you or me. The one whose love and mercy and justice will not be satisfied until all people are made whole in the heart of the triune life and can pull up to the buffet of new creation. Remember, our place in the only party worth its salt is won for us by grace alone. Gift. God's action entirely. Someone else let us in. The crucified one who was raised is the bouncer- so it's all up for grabs.

All this is headed towards the *Lambs* High Feast-- as we will sing. Our king-- the slain lamb. With the slain lamb (wounded one/ones cast out) as the center of our celebration, the table set at the bottom of the mountain, we lay down our defensiveness and our judgements, our stereotypes and our prejudice, our egos and titles and and our tired ways of categorizing others, and receive what we could never earn. How might centering the (wounded and cast out) who society has made the slain lambs change our communities, our values and our priorities and our whole entire feast? How might they enhance and add to our experience? Help us learn how to make space or tear down walls.

Around the lamb there are no more insiders and outsiders. We are somewhere else completely. A whole new plain. Just one table--- where we all meet on level ground beyond the boundaries and distances we create and settle into the vast expanse of grace. Here we can choose each other over and over again. You're in-- so we choose one another.