

Proper 23 (28) - October 11, 2026

- Exodus 32:1-14 - Isaiah 25:1-9 - Philippians 4:1-9 - Matthew 22:1-14

“Guess who’s not coming to dinner”

1. Today’s Bible stories feel a little bit like a family vacation gone wrong.
 - a. We have the parents in the front of the car and the kids in the back of the car,
 - b. and detail after detail is going wrong in the road trip from the moment they pulled out of the garage,
 - i. with the sibling bickering back there,
 - ii. the adults tense about co-piloting and second guessing GPS up here,
 - iii. the unexpected bad weather,
 - iv. the road construction,
 - v. the flat tire,
 - vi. the loud hotel room, you name it...
 - vii. And they’re not even to the destination yet!!
 - c. And perhaps in the minds of everyone in that family is this idea:
 - i. shouldn’t we just turn back and enjoy a quiet week at home?
 - ii. Or the insistence of sticking with the family vacation plan,
 1. toughing it out and forcing the “fun” through the tears and clenched jaws,
 2. hoping that the memories they’ll make at the destination won’t be ruined by frayed relationships and the memories of the unhappy journey getting there.
 - d. Time and time again in the Bible,
 - i. in the stories of God and God’s people,
 - ii. in the stories of Jesus and his disciples,
 - iii. there are these moments when we can just picture God driving the proverbial car, looking on the rearview mirror at the back seat shenanigans of unruly children and threatening the classic:
 1. “Don’t make me come back there...”
 2. or the other popular “Don’t make me turn this car around...”
2. That’s certainly the picture we get in the Exodus passage.
 - a. The shenanigans are getting way out of hand and God just wants to drive the car back home.
 - b. Actually, the language is quite a bit more violent than that.
 - c. It was more like “I’ll leave you on the side of the road and start a new family from scratch.” Yikes!

3. Or in the parable, where all the King wanted to do was to have a nice wedding reception for the son,
 - a. but the guest list is full of snotty people and no one wants to come,
 - b. and yet the reception goes on anyway, with random strangers as guests,
 - c. with death and destruction in a smoldering village in the background,
 - d. and an overstressed host who loses it when an underdressed guest doesn't have the right clothes on. Double yikes!!
4. It's not a stretch to say that at some point or another versions of these stories play out in our lives as people of faith trying to do the right thing,
 - a. and we can relate with either the exasperated parent,
 - b. or the kid who had wanted to go to another destination for their family vacation anyway,
 - c. or the guests who could care less about what the head of government wants,
 - d. or the lowly workers who're just trying to do what the boss says and try to stay out of the way from the tense boss and the disrespectful guest.
5. Our best bet in reading these passages is to try to make out the overarching picture to consider what God's message of hope and love is,
 - a. knowing that the first story is part of the biblical "family album" reminding us of a particularly tough family road trip,
 - b. and knowing that Jesus' parable of the Realm of God is meant to be read as a broad story not as an allegory (an allegory would make a one-to-one substitution of character like saying the king is God, the people in the village are these people, and the underdressed guest is this kind of person, etc.).
6. So first we can think about this: God has feelings
 - a. Ok, that's a very human way of saying it but "human" is the only way we can make sense of things we don't fully understand
 - b. The Exodus story is kind of an origin story in the sense that it's there to signal maybe how we got to this point
 - c. It is a distinct story in the Hebrew Scriptures which is very much part of the larger way in which the Jewish people have come to understand God and themselves
 - d. In a way, then, it's a family album for our cousins, if you will, and we can see the family resemblance in our own story as people who follow God by following Jesus
 - e. God's feelings, then, to get back to that, God's feelings are strong and powerful.
 - i. God loved God's people and wanted to free them
 - ii. God was protective of the people as they journeyed

- iii. God was jealous and angry when the people turned from God and made silly little statues and named them “god”
 - iv. God opts for love even through the anger
 - f. The story is more complicated than this particular snapshot, both for what God showed in terms of feelings and actions, as well as what the people showed in terms of faith and rebellion
 - g. But on looking back at this intense story we feel in our ancestral faith DNA that love from God, our own anxiety when we feel God has forgotten us, and that reassurance when we felt the love of God once again.
7. The second takeaway is equally straight forward: People make choices
- a. The beauty of the story of God and humans is that, for as loving as God is, we humans make choices, we’re not puppets, even if sometimes our actions directly fight that love
 - b. If that doesn’t sound like parenting, I don’t know what does!
 - c. And the choices people make, in relation to God and to other people, may feel like freedom, but sometimes they end up tying us up and limiting more choices
 - d. It’s perhaps easy for us to judge the Hebrews who quickly decided to dump God in favor of some golden calf they made and decide it was god
 - e. We read the ancient story and may think: you’re being so unfair to God! You’re being so disobedient!
 - f. But that’s because we know how the story ends. They didn’t. They thought they were making a good choice, even if with a little bit of reflection or better leadership they may have made a better choice, a more faithful choice
 - g. Missing in that story is how we humans can hold each other accountable for our choices, even to the point of trying to counsel someone to make better ones
 - h. Think about the parable, and how ALL the people act in unison and without much reflection. Or was it peer pressure?
 - i. Even the guy who shows up in the wrong outfit could have been helped before facing the host’s wrath
 - i. Some neighbor could have said: look, it’s not all about the clothes you wear to the party, but about your mindset
 - ii. We gotta work on your attitude before things go sideways
 - iii. We’re making a choice to celebrate and you’re making a choice to rebel – I can tell you that won’t end well.
8. The last thing to consider actually goes back to the first one: God’s love will always surprise us

- a. I won't blame you if you're thinking: whoa, hang on a minute!
 - i. Punishing unfaithful Hebrew people doesn't sound loving
 - ii. If Jesus is trying to describe the Realm of God, what part of "loving" is the burning down of a village?
 - b. You're not wrong. I just think that looking at only part of the family album doesn't give us the whole picture.
 - c. God's love surprises us when God doesn't give up on stubborn and rebellious people in the Bible and today
 - d. God's love surprises us when Jesus breaks down every possible barrier and makes sure that we know we each belong at the table
 - e. God's love surprises us when Jesus challenges us to put aside our agenda and to embrace God's agenda fully – which of course will have a way of guiding our choices towards a better outcome from God's perspective.
9. Guess who's not coming to dinner? The guest who receives God's love but rejects it, who would rather do as they please instead of following the example of Jesus. What may surprise us is that God is more loving than our rejection, and more gracious than our bad choices. What may surprise us is that this isn't the only dinner to which God invites us rebellious humans. Jesus makes it clear the invitation is open and he helps us fit in the celebration.

Reflection questions

1. Remember the story of a family vacation gone wrong, but which all these years later still brings a smile to your face.
2. What are the elements of God's love which can be seen in the stories in Exodus 32:1-14 and Matthew 22:1-14, even if we have to squint a little?
3. In your faith life, how do you reconcile in your heart the tension between God's love and the people's rejection of that love?