

## **THE STORY OF THE WEDDING FEAST**

*Luke 14:7-24*

### **"To share with a stranger"**

When we invite people to a party, we usually invite people we know – people who share the same interests as we do, those we call our friends, or relatives. It's not natural for us to invite someone we don't know, and certainly not those that Jesus calls "the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind".

In the verses before the story of the wedding feast, Jesus challenges us about whom we include in our fellowship and whom we exclude from it. He is even more radical in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:43-48. " 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The story of the Wedding Feast shows how the Kingdom of God transcends our limits. There is no limit to who can be invited. "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (verse 21). "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled" (verse 23).

*Discuss:*

- Have you ever received an unexpected invitation to a party? How did you react?
- Whom do you invite into your home? Are there any strangers in the neighbourhood whom you could invite?  
Discuss what stops you from inviting them, and how you think they would react if you did.
- By inviting them to the Wedding Feast, God affirms the human dignity of the marginalised.  
How can we participate in this affirmation of the identity and human dignity of strangers and the marginalised, and in this way co-operate with God?
- Name specific measures that your congregation can take in order to affirm the human dignity of
  - refugees and asylum seekers
  - immigrant workers
  - socially rejected groups in our society.

## **STORIES FROM NORWAY**

### **MEET A TURKISH WOMAN**

She is Turkish. The pale skin made me think she was Bosnian. She is not a refugee, but has come to Norway like many before her – through ties being made across boundaries. She has

come to Norway because she is married to a Turk who came to Norway as a young man in 1970. They married in 1988, after having met each other the previous year.

She and her family are Norwegian citizens, and have no difficulty in travelling to Turkey to visit their family there. The rest of the family have not been to Norway yet, but she hopes to invite them to come. She says that most of what she has told them about Norway has been positive, and affirms that she intends to stay here. Among the negative experiences she has had, she mentions the long winter.

"As a Muslim, I naturally want to bring up my children as Muslims", she says. At the same time, she believes that they must decide for themselves about their religion when they grow up. A man teaches the children the Koran one afternoon each week, and she herself prays five times a day. But she seldom visits the mosque.

We talk about her experience of being part of Norwegian society. Through her husband she has got many friends in Norway, and she doesn't think that Norwegians withdraw themselves from foreigners. Her hope of getting a job increases as the children grow up. She worked as a secretary for two years in Turkey, and she would like to get the same kind of job in Norway. This dream is a strong stimulus when she struggles with Norwegian grammar in order to become perfect in the language.

The children have gone to kindergarten at KIA (Christian Intercultural Association). "Kindergarten is important, so the children can learn Norwegian properly before starting school", she says. She thinks that the authorities should do more to encourage new groups of Norwegians to send their children to kindergarten, and should support those who cannot afford to do so. She thinks that a minimum of two years would ensure that children were better prepared to start school, and she is proud that her own children are eager to learn.

Eagerness and curiosity are also characteristic for the woman herself. Attitudes like this, rather than condescension and suspicion, are a good starting point for building a society where everyone has rights, responsibilities and possibilities. A society where everyone would be able to contribute – and resist both geographical and spiritual rootlessness.

### **MEET A WOMAN FROM ROMANIA, 55 YEARS OLD**

I came to Norway because I was going to marry a Norwegian man. I had no close relatives in Romania, and my first husband had died. He was probably killed by the secret service. We had both been active in politics, and when Ceaușescu was overthrown we took part in the celebrations. But the joy was short-lived. We soon discovered that nothing had really changed. At the time I worked in a state office, and felt that I was under surveillance. When my husband died in an "accident", all my suspicions were confirmed. A year later some friends introduced me to a Norwegian man. We began to exchange letters, and in the end he proposed to me. I said yes. I no longer had any network in Romania, apart from a few friends. My work situation got difficult, and after someone tried to knock me down with a car, I made up my mind. I would leave and make a new start. I sold my flat and all my possessions and moved to Norway. The idea was that we should get married when my tourist visa expired. But it didn't work out like that. My friend turned out to be a different person from the one I knew from his letters. My first three months in Norway were indescribably painful. I would never have believed that a person could be so evil. We lived in his house, and in the end I had to

escape to the neighbours. I was given police protection until I decided to seek asylum. Then I moved to an asylum reception centre and was given the judicial help I needed. No-one can imagine what it's like not to have anyone or anything in the whole world. My parents are dead, and I'm an only child. But I have made many Norwegian friends. After some years here I have put together a new life, but it hasn't been easy. I had burnt all my bridges to Romania and couldn't go back there. The Romanian police knew about me and would have arrested me at the border. Here in Norway I only want to live in safety. Safety in my daily life, safety when I think of the future. I'm grateful to Norway for giving me that opportunity.