

## THE BEAUTY OF THE KING

Pentecost 14 Year B

Song 2:8-13; Ps. 45:1-2, 6-9; Jas. 1:17-27; Mk. 7:1-8,14-15,21-23 Gladstone 29/08/2021

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Weddings. Almost everyone enjoys attending and participating in a wedding. The people, the pageantry, the extravagant and fashionable attire, the catching up with all the rellies—particularly those whom you haven't seen in years (apart from Uncle Bob—we try not to talk about him too much)—the music, the dancing, the humour, the delicious banquet feast. The actual rite of marriage, particularly if it's a Christian wedding and held in a church with all the Christian symbolism surrounding it, makes wonderful memories for the future and milestones for our lives. They are memorable and celebratory.

In today's psalm, Psalm 45, which scholars identify as a "royal psalm," we are given a description of what seems to be the wedding of a king and a princess. Some believe that this psalm is dated around the time of King Solomon, and that it's an account of his wedding—well, one of the rumoured 700 of them at any rate—but who's counting. Whoever's wedding it was and whenever or wherever it occurred, it has the makings of one gala event.

This psalm or song, however, goes far beyond an application just to the kingdom of Israel and the person of Israel's king. There are clues in the very inscription of the song that point us in another direction. Psalm 45 is, we are told, a maskil, one of only 13 psalms that bear this title. The term "maskil" means that it's a psalm that gives instruction. It's purpose is to promote wisdom and piety among God's people. The sons of Korah—the authors of this psalm—were a group of poets who produced material for the worship of God. Psalm 45 is also described as a song in accordance with the lilies—a song of beauty and joy—a song, if you will, of love.

Psalm 45 also confronts us with one of the most important issues in interpreting and preaching the Psalms in general. Is this Psalm merely about some ancient royal wedding, or does it also convey some kind of spiritual truth—perhaps, for us, about the relationship of Christ to his church? The idea of it being a maskil, certainly points us in this direction.

The terms of the psalm itself show that its content goes far beyond even Israel's greatest king. Verse 6 reads: *"Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity."* We find that exact text quoted in Hebrews 1:8 where it is directly applied to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This psalm, then, is one of a number of Messianic psalms that pointed God's people forward to the great King—beyond Solomon—who was coming into the world and who would establish his kingdom on earth.

What sort of a king, then, is the one described in this psalm? Is it king that will strike fear into the hearts of his followers, or is it a king who by his very person and work thrills the souls of his people and makes them want to serve him with everything they have? Well, look at how the king is described in Psalm 45: *"You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever."*

This king, the psalm tells us, is fairer than the sons of men, but it's not because he is more handsome or taller or more broad-shouldered than other men that grace is poured upon him. It's because of his gracious speech and the fact that he is the champion of truth and meekness and righteousness. Those things can be said of Solomon, but only up to a point. He was famous for his matchless wisdom and when the Queen of Sheba visited him, she could not help but be impressed. His reputation had gone before him and all the stories about Solomon, she discovered, were true. His nobility and his knowledge attracted people to him and won their hearts. But if this was true of Solomon, how much more the Son of God?

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." His name is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, the Prince of Peace. There never has been a king like Jesus Christ and never will there be again. If you know Christ and examine his works, how could you not be impressed. From impetuous Peter who testified: You are the Christ, the son of the living God; to Thomas, who said: My Lord and my God; to Mary who dried his feet with her hair. If you had been in the presence of the Master, if you had lived with him for three years and been taught by him, you could not fail but be motivated and challenged. You would love him too. "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friend." This is a king who has done this for all his people.

As a king was supposed to do, Jesus embodied God's faithfulness, ministered to the humbled and afflicted and enacted God's will for rightly ordering the world. Christians have traditionally understood this psalm as a song of love between Christ and his church.

As we further reflect on Psalm 45, there are three aspects of the beauty or glory of Christ come into view: In his person or being, in his Kingdom and in his marriage to his church.

In ultimate terms, Jesus is the most striking or prominent being. None greater can be conceived. But in comparative terms, when he is set beside the best of the human race, the believer has to say that he is "fairer than the sons of men" (v2). He is the recipient of God's blessing of grace, eternally equal with the Father, and full of grace and truth. There is nothing in Him that can be eclipsed or outshone by anything or anyone in the world.

Is this how we see Christ? Do we rejoice at the very thought of Him? Is there sufficient in him to satisfy our deepest longings and draw from us our deepest loves? His people in every age have found this to be true with him. May it be true of us also!

Not only do we see the glory of Christ in himself, however, in his person and in his being, His glory is also seen in His Kingdom and in the position he occupies there. He is not only the recipient of a blessing, he is also the occupant of a throne—a throne that is eternal. For this reason God has anointed him with the oil of joy and gladness, and there is a resultant majesty and honour which belongs to him above all others.

People would normally think of a king and tremble. The Christian thinks of this king and rejoices. There is none like him, and there is none to compare with him. From his sovereign throne, Christ made all things, as the eternal Word, whose decrees and purposes were carried out and fulfilled in a majestic display of creative power. He spoke, and it was done. Through him, the world was created. He gave shape to a formless earth, and fulness to an empty universe. From His sovereign throne all things are ordered rightly and assured.

And it's from that same throne that he saves sinners by his grace, sovereignly drawing them to himself and enabling them to exercise a living faith in him. Only by his divine power at work in their lives are sinners able to come to Him—turning away from every other ground of hope and confidence, to trust in Christ alone for time and for eternity.

And that same throne is called by the writer to the Hebrews, a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), where grace is bestowed upon sinners in their times of need. He sovereignly gives life to his new creation—to those whom he has made new by his divine power and according to his divine image. Those who know the power of his throne, like Thomas, fall down at His feet and say to Jesus, “My Lord and my God”.

The third aspect of Christ's glory—and this is really important for us—we see the Glory of Christ in His Marriage.

Unfortunately, the lectionary reading from Psalm 45 this morning, leaves out the latter part of the psalm, from verse 10 onwards. In verse 10 and the beginning of verse 11, the psalmist writes: *“Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty.”* He goes on, then to speak of the beauty of the bride being presented to the bridegroom.

Here is another display of Christ's magnificence in this psalm—as a portrait is painted for us of a royal wedding—of a bride called from among the daughters of men who has left all for Christ. The psalm that declares the beauty of the royal Saviour also declares the beauty of his spouse (v11). In the king's palaces, with gladness and rejoicing, the marriage supper of the Lamb is prepared, and Christ is ready to receive his bride, the church (cf. Revelation 19:9).

As Paul in Ephesians 5:25ff tells us, Christ loved His church and gave Himself for that church. This is the greatest marriage of all—the paradigm for every marriage relationship here in this world. In all generations of this world's history, those born out of the spiritual union between Christ and His bride will witness for him and lead to his being praised among the nations. There is nothing in the world to compare with the realisation that Christ is all, and that grace is supreme.

As Psalm 45 was studied and read down through the ages, it was and still is read and interpreted by people of faith as a "Messianic psalm." As such, it describes the marriage of the Messiah-King with his faithful people in the heavenly realm. The "bride-to-be" represents God's faithful people, the church, and the king represents the Messiah. The king's palace represents God's eternal realm.

As a people of faith, here in this place, may we too place our trust, our hope, and our future in this vision of marriage with Jesus our Messiah—who, one day, will welcome us into his palace, his eternal realm. In joy and gladness we celebrate our marriage with the Messiah-King every time we gather for worship around word and sacrament as we do today, which provide us with, as we affirm in our Communion liturgy: "a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to come."

May we each know the power of Christ's love, showing to us the altogether loveliness of the Saviour, as we, his bride, give up all for the sake of him.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen`.