



“A Chorus Line” opened in 1975, played on Broadway for 15 years, and was made into a movie. Along the way, the musical garnered many awards and played across the globe—including in London and Australia as well as several productions in the United States. It won many Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

The premise is that a new musical is being cast. Many have been invited to audition but only 8 will be chosen. The casting director is primarily off-stage: a voice you hear but a person you do not see. The voice holds the future of those auditioning in his hands.

All of the dancers are highly talented. All desperately want to be one of the 8 chosen – and yet they know the odds are against them. There’s a dispute over whether the story is about new dancers hoping to break into Broadway or whether the story is about veteran dancers hoping for one last role before having to acknowledge that their days as a dancer are over. Regardless of whether the dancers are newbies or veterans, most of them will be cast out. There simply aren’t enough spaces for everyone to get chosen.

Today’s Gospel is hard, particularly from a 21st century outlook. Why preach on it then? There were certainly other choices: a reading from the Hebrew Bible, a Psalm, and a New Testament reading. In fact, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians is one with great resonance: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice.” Much easier and palatable as compared to “For many are called but few are chosen.”

And yet, by struggling with this text, some things come through that we may have missed before. And, there is at least one interpretation of this text that I categorically reject.

Sometimes, “preaching against the text” helps to clarify other ways of looking at that scripture. To see how scripture continues to be alive today – even in a very different context from the time in which it was written.

At the time the Gospel of Matthew was written, many believed that the Second Coming – the Final Judgment - would be any day. There was a sense of urgency about “getting it right”. Many people at the time believed that those who did not come to accept Jesus as Christ would be damned forever and suffer the torments of hell.

Living some two centuries from the time this Gospel was written has removed that sense of urgency. However, the fundamental message that Jesus is the Christ and the source of eternal life remains true.

In this case, the verse: “many are called, but few are chosen” may have been one used by Calvin and some of the other great theologians of the Reformation to support their belief that before creation God had selected some of humanity as “elect.” Everyone else was destined to be thrown into outer darkness.

No matter what you did, your future was already pre-destined. And, because you didn’t know whether you were one of the elect or one of the damned, you better live your life as if you were one of the elect – just in case. Some still hold to this view of God. I find it unpersuasive.

Many of us believe that God truly wants to be in relationship with all of us. That is why the king in the parable sends servants to invite people to the wedding banquet for his son. When the initial invitation is refused, the king sends more servants to invite more people. When those servants are killed, the king sends yet another set of servants to the street corners to invite anyone the servants see. Those people – both good and bad- accept the invitation to the banquet. God –thinly disguised as the king- wants all of us – warts and all- to celebrate the wedding of the king’s son - thinly disguised as Jesus.

God wants each and every one of us to be present. God keeps sending messengers until we respond and go to the banquet. If God wants to be in relationship with each of us –and for us to find nourishment in that relationship – then why is the one who came without a wedding robe thrown out? Especially if that one was picked up off the street corner – either literally or figuratively. It would be unlikely that he would be wearing party clothes while hanging out on a street corner.

So why what is appears to be not his fault the reason for his being bound and discarded? Is there a “dress code” for appearing before God? Or, another way of thinking about the one without a wedding robe is to remember that when I was growing up, you didn’t wear white shoes before Easter or after Labor Day. It wasn’t socially acceptable. If God is that concerned about this kind of social mis-step, then I am in deep trouble.

What the parable may be saying is that once we accept God’s invitation, we are expected to live a life that witnesses to Jesus the Christ as our Lord and Savior. To confess Jesus as Lord with our lips and yet live a life that denies the reality of who Christ is and what Christ has done for us is inconsistent and hypocritical.

That kind of life might get us thrown out of the banquet and into the deep. This parable is one of several in a row where Jesus challenges the leaders of that time. Some commentators suggest that

the slaves or servants sent by the king to invite the guests represent the prophets that the people of Israel refused to hear (and in some cases even exiled or killed). The failure of those invited to attend the banquet then represents the failure of the people, as a whole, to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. The king calls all people – not just the people of Israel- to the banquet.

The director in “A Chorus Line” is having trouble making up his mind about who to select. Everyone is talented. Any of them would do a good job. To help him make that decision, he begins to ask each person to describe his or her life – where he is from, a little about her family, and what dreams and hopes the dancer has. The director is seeking to establish relationship between himself and the dancer as part of the process in making the decision about who to call and who to cast out.

During this part of the show, the character Diana sings one of the most poignant songs: “What I Did for Love.” In that song she recaps the choices she made in her life – some of which didn’t have the desired result. Yet, even with the pain of loss, she remembers that the decisions were made for love and she would do it again.

Jesus lived his life loving everyone – those who were socially correct, those who were marginalized, those who had plenty and those who had nothing. What he did, he did for love.

What he asked of those he came into contact with, and what he continues to ask of us today, is to model that love in how we live each day. To acknowledge that there is one God, one faith, one baptism. To do what we do for love. And to understand that unlike the director in “A Chorus Line”, all are welcome.

Come to the feast.

You are welcome at the feast regardless of your past. You are welcome at the feast regardless of what you are wearing. You are welcome as a beloved child of the God who wants more than anything to enfold you in love and let you know that you are ok just as you are. Come to the feast. Amen.