

“The Wedding Feast For His Son”
Matthew 22:1-14
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 11, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus begins his parable, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son...”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Here we are again, as we said last week, on the Tuesday of Holy Week (as every gospel reading until the end of the Church Year minus Reformation and All Saints will be), with Jesus on the verbal offensive against the religious leaders in a series of parables. This third parable is best understood if we review the two previous that build up to this climactic one. The first, the parable of the two sons, taught us that the one doing the will of God is the one who repents. That penitent posture then takes comfort in the second parable, which teaches that the repentant may look for the Son, who has been made the cornerstone and sure foundation of the Church, that glorious vineyard that the Lord takes from one faithless people and gives to those who will believe and cherish His Word.

With that context, we come to the third parable, which teaches of the *gifts* of that Son. Jesus begins, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” Though the parable is really about the sending of servants to

invite, let's not overlook this initial phrase: "a king who gave a wedding feast for his son."

How perfectly and succinctly does this phrase focus us on the centrality of Christ in the grace of God toward sinners. We self-centered sinners tend to think God's love toward us is all about us... that all people are 'children of God' and have a 'relationship with God' *regardless of Christ*, so that the crucified is forgotten and relegated to a corner of the salvation equation. We fall into the trap of thinking God serves us for the sake of us, as if *we* are the 'guest of honor,' the 'man of the hour' in the divine service. We too easily get itchy ears that don't want sermons about *Christ*, but about how God is going to "improve my life and livelihood." Or, another symptom of a self-centered view of God's wedding feast to which we're invited, we perhaps put conditions on when we are willing to benefit... only at a particular *time* or under particular *conditions* or subservient to particular *priorities*. Sinfully, we can at times have a righteous pride to our benefiting, rather than rejoicing at the mere *hope* that crumbs will fall from the master's banqueting table... rejoicing at that hope much like a dog that, no matter what is going on around it, it will not leave its spot under the table or take its eye off of that which he expects to fall from above... but intently waits and yearns for the benefit.

You *get* to be here... it's "for you" in the sense of 'for your benefit' but not in the sense of 'for your honor.' Rather, the wedding

feast is in the honor of and for the sake of the Son, as you yourself confess when you plead, “for the sake of Your Son, have mercy on us.” Indeed, God is always gracious to us, but not gracious “for your sake,” but “for the sake of His Son.” God is always interacting with us, not because He is pleased with *us*, but because He is pleased with *His Son*. God is always inviting to the wedding feast, not because He hosts a feast for *us*, but for *his Son*. His Son is the groom of the feast; His Son is the man of the hour; His Son is married to His bride, the Church... and that marriage will be continually celebrated eternally regardless of whether you as an invited guest celebrate that marriage or disregard it.

Let us learn from Jesus’ parable, which continues by highlighting those who disregard the feast. What a slap in the face to the King is their disregard... for, as Jesus’ parable illustrates, that King had sent his servants for the single purpose of proclaiming invitation to all who were invited. But “they would not come.”

“Again,” the text says, “he sent *other* servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready.’” Is that not a picture of the sacrificial system?... fulfilled in Christ’s own sacrifice! Everything is ready; of the preparation, God himself can say, “It is finished.” All that is left is to celebrate; but...

...”they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.”

Now, we ought note two specific details in this: **first**, that Jesus uses the exact same repetition as in the previous parable... almost a ‘mental symmetry,’ if you will. Just as (in last week’s parable) the tenants refused the first round of servants, then treated the second round more harshly (to the point of death), likewise this parable’s invited guests follow the pattern. Jesus is obviously paralleling the parables, that all might know the invited guests of this parable include the tenants of the previous parable. Were not the religious leaders of the Old Covenant some of the first invited guests? With *all* of God’s chosen Israel, did He not want *them* to benefit from the coming Christ and his marriage to His Church?

But, as we said last week, we ought not focus too narrowly on condemning the religious leaders. That’s the **second** detail of this verse. Jesus says, “they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business.” That’s not describing the religious leader; that’s describing the ‘average man,’ the laity! Today’s sins of disinterest regarding the divine marriage banquet are not unique to today; even in the Old Covenant, one’s daily life was idolized and worshipped over the divine invitation to benefit from God Most High. Do we really think pastors are “tone-deaf to the real world” when they urge you not to choose sports, extracurriculars, business

and farm over the weekly marriage feast? No, such tough love is not tone-deaf, but is tuned to thousands of years of temptation's history. We may not be those religious leaders who seized the prophets, treated them shamefully, and killed them; but we so frequently resemble those who "paid no attention and went off" and turned a blind eye and a deaf ear, permitting the other invitees to treat the prophets so shamefully.

And, what are we so often told, with almost a trite, sing-songy excuse? "Oh, it's okay. God doesn't mind. He'll always be here for you next week." But what does Jesus say in the parable: "The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

Now, this is a stunning verse on which to meditate. Do we not know in history what happened to Israel as it grew faithless? Jerusalem was destroyed by the enemy, even as Jeremiah poured out Lamentations over its demise. Do we not learn the lesson?

Let's consider this carefully: who are "the *troops* of the king"? We never hear of them in other parables – who are they? They're the world's kingdoms and rulers. Remember Nebuchadnezzar and Darius? Kings of Babylon and godless, faithless rulers of themselves – nevertheless, the instruments of God, the "troops of the king", *to humble Israel in captivity and bring her to repentance*? Didn't we hear similar sentiments in last week's parable about the vineyard producing wild grapes, with the result that the

Lord tears apart his vineyard, bringing discord and strife to it, that the wild grapes would be uprooted?

Israel's history is a cautionary tale for us, as is every other civilization which gave up on, and became disinterested in and "paid no attention to" those who faithfully bring God's Word and so is subjected to the "troops" of the king: earthly armies, dictators, tyrants, sword-bearers. Christian author Rod Dreher (Book Club readers may remember his book *The Benedict Option*) is sounding the alarm on the faithlessness of America, saying that – after years of interviewing Russians and Romanians who fled their mother countries to find refuge here and are now seeing the same thing happen *here* that they fled *there* – Dreher comments that the overwhelming refrain of those interviewees as to what happened in their homelands that tyranny would fall upon them... the simple refrain is: "they forgot God." They "paid no attention" to the feast's invitation... nor to the history of Israel, which God gave as examples for us, that we might not die in faithlessness, as they did. Where the American has not learned the lesson – worshiping materialism, idolizing self-gratification, trampling the family, tearing asunder marriage, literally killing our youngest children – where the American has not learned the lesson, God grant that the Church in America learns it and repents, that each Christian repents of his own sin (and you know what those sins are!), that we may be defended by the blood of the Lamb when God sends in His troops.

Where the troops of the parable's king come in, curbing the godlessness of those who refuse the invitation to the feast, the king follows on their heels with a *new* word, a *new* command, to his servants, his messengers, his sent ones, his apostles. He says to them, "The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. **Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.**"

Here, friends, is the great Gospel proclamation of this parable. "Go therefore," the king says, as Jesus' parable previews his final words in Matthew's gospel: "Go therefore (same two-word phrase in the Greek)... Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Yes, what familiarity in those words, what gospel in those words! That God would not send more troops, but would give this new charge to his messengers to go out to the main roads, to the highways and byways traveled by people of all nations, and he would extend his gracious invitation to "all whom they found, both bad and good." Isn't that the very definition of salvation by grace alone? – that the bad have just the same invitation as the good! If the good were shown preference, such invitation would be merit-based; but the invitation is by the grace of the King, for the honor of his Son... and, for the sake of his Son, he has mercy on good and bad alike. Indeed, mercy even on the *good*, for the good were not

previously invited (as if meritorious), but only *now* invited, that the king may celebrate His Son by sharing the riches with all.

Recall what Paul said to the Philippians, as we read it last week: “not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but the righteousness which comes through faith *in Christ* (yes, the wedding banquet is for *the Son*),... the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness *from God*” (the king who hosts the feast).

All of that is freely and celebratorily shared with you, for you, too, are beneficiary of the charge the king gave to the messengers, “Go therefore... go to the main roads... go to all nations, and baptize them.”

Well, now we understand why Jesus includes the final scene of the parable, don't we? The king enters the celebration and there is one there with no wedding garment. Does it mean he stood naked before the king – which no man can do without shame and guilt... or, does it mean he indeed had on a *different* garment, one that belonged to a *different* (enemy-) king and not a garment for *this* feast? Whether wearing the garment of allegiance to another or bearing the nakedness of his reliance on self, neither is acceptable, and the king calls him out for making such a scene at the feast: “How did you get in here without a wedding garment?” In other words, this feast is closed... invitees only; members only; only those who cherish and proudly wear the wedding garment that celebrates the truth of

the wedding of the Son to His bride. Or, as Jesus tells Nicodemus, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”... cannot enter the feast given for the Son.

The man is speechless, which does not intend to mean he is blindsided and shocked that he’s unwelcome. Rather, it is the same word used later in the chapter when the pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced/muzzled the Sadducees. They had no argument, for they knew they were in the wrong. The speechlessness is a reminder that the sinner is (as St Paul says elsewhere), “without excuse/without explanation.”

What deep regret and gnashing of teeth will be known by those who refuse to wear the wedding garment of baptism and its faith, that baptismal faith that rejoices in the honor of the Son, the generosity of the king *for the sake of His Son*, and the celebratory feast for all the faithful to share in joy of the eternal union between the Son and his Church. Yes, what deep regret for those who at first paid no attention, for those who thought it better to strive after earthly wealth, happiness, success, enjoyment... for they will be left empty-handed by death, the troops of God having done the dirty work of destroying all the vain hopes of the godless... and then those godless will be left to join with the faithless of Israel, the religious leaders and all who paid no attention to the Christ... they will all be left outside to watch as the celebratory feast continues forever on Mt Zion, just as the King himself declares through the servant Isaiah,

words of the servant the King most graciously now sends to fill your ears with all the goodness that flows from heaven because of the glory and merit of the Son:

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.” ... The body of Christ, the blood of Christ, for you.

Rejoice, dear friends, for you wear the wedding garments of holy baptism and, with it, the endless invitation to remain fixed on Christ Jesus – to allow all the noise of the world around you rage and foment as kingdoms rise and fall, as the king’s troops do their dirty work to strip the faithless and bring them to nothing – and you may, safe in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding but guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus – you may (with that Son, in honor of that Son, for the sake of that Son) you may join even today by faith in that feast that will one day become visible for all the world, when all those who weep and gnash their teeth will hear the Church’s deafening refrain:

Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD, we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
October 11, 2020