

Matthew 22:1-14
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 15, 2023

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

Our text, another parable of Jesus, which he begins this way: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You would think that a story about a wedding feast would be the most joyous, delightful story – full of grand description about: the finely decorated hall, the finely dressed guests, the banquet music, the merriment. And that’s what it *should* be, right? That’s what a wedding feast *is*. And, especially so for the kingdom of heaven! The work of the Messiah is done. He has laid down his life on behalf of his bride and taken it up again for her benefit! His Father rejoices in his Son and loves the Bride to whom His Son has joined himself in an everlasting union. What reason for celebration, merriment, wedded bliss!

But, this parable doesn’t seem to match the euphoria. What it *does* match, what it does *sound like* and *hint at* is the parable we heard in last week’s text, the parable of the vineyard and the tenants who treated the messengers shamefully and killed the son of the vineyard owner that they might take the

vineyard by force. Yes, we have shades of that in this morning's parable: the king sent servants to tell the invited guests, "'Come to the wedding feast.' 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."

It's obvious, isn't it, that Jesus wants to keep his hearers focused on the connection between these parables... or at least, to hear the common theme of His own people rejecting the Christ sent to them. Yes, the vineyard parables are over... the fruits have been borne from Christ's cross, the blood has been pressed as wine from his hands and side, the Church has been established by his sacrificial death and his overpowering resurrection which shatters all his enemies to pieces. So, it *should* be time to celebrate! The sacrificial animal has been slaughtered, the feast has been prepared, "everything is ready," the king of the parable says. The people of God are called to gather and rejoice in Christ's marriage to His beloved and benefit from the wine outpoured and the feast prepared.

But – in the Holy Week during which Jesus tells this parable – God's people of the Old Covenant have faithless descendants. The king now rules a kingdom of subjects who have grown lazy and complacent in the goodness of the kingdom. They've become entitled recipients of the promise of the Christ,

and they find it an inconvenience (at best) to come to the feast. After all, they have farms, they have businesses, they have wealth and success and creature comforts. Being invited to a feast would distract them from all that!

So, in their ingratitude they rough up the messengers and even kill them. (Notice, in last week's parable, they killed the Son. But, in this week's parable, the son's glory is secured and the celebration is ready. Those who are killed are the messengers sent to proclaim not "give us fruits keeping with repentance" but the messengers sent to proclaim "Christ is married to His Church. It's the feast of the New Covenant. Come and join us!" In other words, it's no longer the prophets who are assaulted and killed, but now the apostles and early church martyrs and pastors in every generation.) And, as the invited guests assault and kill the servants of the King, the King in turn destroys the wicked invitees.

And then he does a remarkable thing; he says that no longer does previous association or status as 'favored guest' or as 'favored people of God' matter: "Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find."

The servants are sent to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the gentiles to the end of the earth... and from north, south, east and west they are brought. And the wedding hall is filled for celebration.

Seems like a good point to stop the parable, doesn't it? But Jesus' point is to teach, not to entertain. And, as we said last week, his point isn't to teach an antinomian spirit, "Someone else was wicked; you now benefit. Enjoy!" Rather, his purpose is to teach us to *cherish* that which has been gifted to us without merit or price... that which has been gifted to us that we might be called "worthy" and, though truly "unworthy" would delight in and thus desire to confess His goodness by which we are declared "worthy."

So, the parable continues, that Jesus might make the point he's made so often in his teachings: The Church is not without its pretenders... those who look the part of faith, even though they secretly mock it in their heart... those who are ignorant of the faith, even though they pretend they know it so well they can improve upon it and make it "more relevant" for today.

And how does Jesus make that point in this parable? – the king, scanning his guests, sees a man without the expected wedding garment. "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" And the man is speechless... or, from the Greek, muzzled... or, as we hear elsewhere, "without excuse." When those who rejected the gospel, then seek on the final day to be smuggled in to the kingdom of heaven and numbered among the heirs, they will be found and will be discarded. No

weed will get in with the wheat, no goat with the sheep, no faithless with the faithful. The faithful of God will be vindicated in total purity, meaning there will be no one in the celebration who did not share the earthly patience and long-suffering borne by those daily identified in their baptisms.

That wedding garment in the parable *is* the image of baptismal faith, isn't it? John records in Revelation the words of the elder, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Yes, the baptismal garment so often thought of as the garment of infancy in the faith will one day be recognized in its maturity as the wedding garment of the never-ending marriage banquet. This is no 'spiritual sounding' make-believe garment, as if we ought imagine us all walking around in choir robes ... it's the description of what it means that in holy baptism you have been covered by Christ and his righteousness. No more does the king see you and your naked shame, but only Christ and his righteousness. The psalm of this morning's Introit confesses, "he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." That's the garment of which we speak... not a literal robe used for make-believe, but the salvation and righteousness that covers those who in baptism and its faith have put on Christ.

And, when the king scans his banquet hall, you will there and then be wearing the wedding garment because you here and now are not ashamed to wear it.

“Well,” you might hesitate, “maybe sometimes I am ashamed of it; maybe sometimes, I don’t confess before men; maybe sometimes I think of baptism as a hoop I once jumped through and now would be caught without excuse if the Lord asked me why I am not wearing it.”

Then, repent. Repent, for that’s the whole point of the parable, isn’t it? That Jesus knows the hearts of the chief priests and pharisees that, oh yes, they’ll certainly be willing to rub elbows with God and be recognized reputationally as one belonging to him... but they’re not about to depend upon Him, and bear the fruits of the vineyard in keeping with repentance, and take precious time out of their creaturely-comforted daily lives to come to his altar and receive the gifts of the marriage banquet. And, if not, then neither will they receive a share in the never-ending feast of life everlasting.

But, you who wear that baptism in daily life, so that Old Adam is never left to be his own king, but always interrupted in his insatiable appetite for sin by a New Adam who loves God’s Law and desires His holy will be done among us... you who wear that baptism in and through daily life are indeed wearing the

wedding garments earned for you on the cross, freely given you in the washing of water and the Word for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the faith He brings, and thus sustaining you unto your share of the never-ending marriage feast.

But, we must with the same honesty as our Lord who died for the whole world, we must with the same honesty digest his words regarding the whole world. How does he end this parable of what should be a wedding banquet of eternal bliss? – “Many are called, few are chosen.”

It’s a word of warning, isn’t it. From east, west, north, and south, the nations are called. But few are chosen... by the word, he means, “few are faithful.” How many put on the wedding garment of baptismal faith only to take it off again, to say they’ve outgrown it, graduated from it, matured beyond it, ‘see the world in a new light’...

Thus, pray to God that He would continue to graciously pour out His gifts to you, for in His Word and Sacrament He promises forgiveness *and the strengthening of faith*. That, we who are weak in daily life may be forgiven for daily life and may be strengthened for daily life that we may bear the fruits keeping with repentance. Guard yourself against the temptation to love ‘your farm’ (if you will... your ‘homestead’), your business, your daily life *more than or in competition with* Christ’s gifts... the

banquets provided in your own household more than the banquet provided in God's household. "But, Pastor, the memories and good times of our households will be with us every day of our lives." True, but the gifts of God will sustain you for eternity.

Of the 'prayers for the pastor' that hang in my office, one prays to God, "I confess unto Thee... my seeking after good days and vainglory." Yes, there's "vainglory" – glory only for today and today's comfort, and then there's true glory, the glory of our share in Christ forever.

So, pray to God that He would sustain and keep us that – as we heard St Paul say to the Philippians last week – we may "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Hear that? The *upward call*. Many are called, few are chosen... but to the few who remain faithful to their baptismal calling, the Lord promises the benefits of Zion:

"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined" – or, we might envision it – an eternal wedding banquet – in which "he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth."

Notice that, he will take away your reproach and he will vindicate you before all who mocked you for seeking God's holy will, all those who thought the wedding banquet would include a gluttonous free-for-all. But, the Lord will throw them into outer darkness and take away your reproach and "wipe away tears from all faces." Sounds a bit like the scene of comfort in Revelation, doesn't it? ... that same book of Revelation that also brings the image of eternity to that phrase Jesus uses – "many are called, few are chosen." For, in the final chapters of Revelation, as the glorious King conquers in the fight, how does it speak of what he described through parable in our text?:

"They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

Thank God for the Word and Sacraments by which he gives you the benefits of Christ's cross – the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of faith – for, through these gifts he has called and chosen you, calls you – his baptismally-arrayed faithful... he calls you all your life to – even gives you a first-taste of – the wedding banquet that will know no end.

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

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
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