

Matthew 22:1-14 - “A Mysterious Wedding”

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What does our Lord have for us to feast on today in His Word to enable us to “*not be anxious about anything,*” but instead to “*rejoice in the Lord always*” (as St. Paul writes in our Epistle reading from Philippians 4)? While the Lord promises that there will be nothing in the world to come that will cause us to be anxious or put a damper on our rejoicing, there are plenty of things in this world that seek to fill us with worry and to make our lives miserable. And if you’re like me, those things have certainly been successful in many ways. That’s why our readings, while they remind us of the perfect peace and joy we can look forward to in the world to come, their main focus is on our lives here and now. So, how is it possible for us here and now to overcome our anxious thoughts which dampen our joy in the Lord?

One of the things I was reminded of at the recent Pastor’s Conference I attended, is that our enemies in this world that cause us so much grief are not other people. “*For*” (as God tells us in Ephesians 6:12), “*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood [other people], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*” These “*spiritual forces of evil*” at work in us Christians and certainly in unbelievers, they are our enemy, not the people they work through to attack us.

Isaiah refers to these “*spiritual forces of evil*” as “*the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.*” This “*covering*” seeks to prevent us from seeing or believing in the glorious work of God in Jesus Christ. God tells us that “*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Corinthians 4:4). We have a bunch of unbelievers in our midst this morning, and they’re in each one of us—our sinful nature. The “*spiritual [invisible] forces of evil*” seek to make themselves visible through our words and actions in an attempt to destroy the peace and joy that God gives us through faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ parable about a mysterious wedding shines His light on this very thing happening in the lives of His people, and on the unexpected way God works to restore His peace and joy. Jesus’ parable begins with a “*king who gave a wedding feast for his son.*” The king in this parable would be God the Father, and His Son (the Bridegroom) is Jesus Christ. Who’s the bride? We know from elsewhere in Scripture that the bride of Christ is the Church, which includes you and me and all those for whom Jesus paid the ultimate bride price (His very life on the cross) to reunite or marry us with Him forever (Ephesians 5:32). Therefore, in Jesus’ parable, the bride would be those who are invited to the wedding feast.

This is part of the unexpected nature of this parable. But why do we need to be invited to our own wedding feast? If you think about those who first heard Jesus’ parable, which included the chief priests and Pharisees, part of the reason they needed to be invited was because the “*spiritual forces of evil,*” at work in their sinful nature, were successful in blinding them to their need for a Savior to free them from their sinful nature.

The same is true for you and me. Why are we at times not interested in attending the foretaste of the wedding feast to come, which God provides for us

today through His Word and Sacraments? In Jesus' parable one bride was more interested in their work on the farm, and another in their business—their bus[y]-ness with other things. This speaks of our business or bus[y]-ness in securing the pleasures of this world, at the expense of the eternal pleasures which God has earned for us through His death and resurrection. While God doesn't want us to neglect our life in this world, when the temporary things of this world become more important than the eternal things of God, that's a sign that the "*spiritual forces of evil*" have convinced us that the dangers in the world around us are not that dangerous, and that what God is here to give us is not that important. And the more you miss church, the less you miss church.

I thank God, therefore, for your presence here today at this foretaste of the wedding feast to strengthen your faith in the only true God, who is here to recover or clothe you with His peace and joy through His promises of forgiveness and eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

The next part of Jesus' parable talks about letting the rest of the world know that God has called them to this wedding feast as well—that He also wants them to be a part of His family through His Son, even though they are poor miserable sinners. And what better people to tell them this Good News than poor miserable sinners like you and me, re-covered with faith in the Good News that "*while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" to pay for our sins (Romans 5:8), and then rose from the dead, victorious over our sins, death and all the "*spiritual forces of evil*" which covered our lives and held us captive? He frees from our anxieties and fills us with joy in His presence now and forever!

That brings us to the final part of Jesus parable, about the "*man who had no wedding garment.*" Since this man was cast into "*outer darkness,*" where "*there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (referring to hell), it's safe to assume that the wedding garment refers to the saving faith that God clothes us with through His Word and Baptism. For whatever reason, this man who was invited by God and clothed with saving faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, later chose to reject Him, thus re-clothing himself with the death grip of sin.

I think here of those in the area of Israel, at the forefront of today's news. A majority of the Jews today, despite God's long suffering patience with them, still reject Jesus as the promised Savior, as do around 98% of the Palestinians in Palestine who confess the Muslim faith. The people of Israel were the first to be called by God to receive His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, but those who die rejecting Jesus as their Savior will be "*cast...into the outer darkness,*" as Jesus makes clear in His parable. The same can happen to you and me since by our faith in Jesus Christ we who are called by God, like the rest of mankind, can choose to reject Him (Romans 11:21). That's not God's choice, but it can be ours.

So, how does God make it possible for us to not be "*anxious*" about falling prey to such a fate, but instead to "*rejoice in the Lord always*"? Through the continual hearing of the Good News of His love and resurrection victory over all the "*spiritual forces of evil*" in us and in the world around us. When we hear God's words, "*I forgive you all your sins*" He washes our sins away and re-clothes or re-covers us with the glorious wedding garment of faith—faith in His almighty, saving presence, thus enabling us to "*not be anxious*" but to "*rejoice in the Lord always!*" All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] Use water gun to remind us of Jesus' work on the cross (allowing sinners to shoot nails and a spear into Him and kill Him), and off of the cross (His resurrection power to wash us clean of our sinful nature and at the same time cloth us with His love). [Shoot water straight up into the air, so that water falls on us.]