

October 15, 2023
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 22:1–14 (Isaiah 25:6–9; Philippians 4:4–13)

COME TO THE FEAST

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

Jesus concludes today's Gospel parable saying:

“For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14)

There was a day that when I heard those words I would despair. I wondered: *“How do I know? How can I be sure if I'm one of the chosen? How can I be certain of my salvation.”* Martin Luther once referred to this type of thinking as the, ***“... monster of uncertainty [which] is worse than all the other monsters.”*** (LW 26. 386-87) The monster of being uncertain of your salvation. And while today's parable is primarily a word of judgment and warning against the religious leaders of Israel and indirectly to you and me – it's also a Gospel illustration of the certainty of God's generosity and divine grace in His rule and reign in Christ Jesus for all who believe.

Jesus is in Jerusalem just days before He will be brutally murdered on Calvary's cross to win salvation for all mankind. Many people had heard His teaching and witnessed His miracles and believed in Him. But the religious leaders see Him as a threat to their power and prestige among the people. They're seeking to arrest Him, but they fear the crowds who believe Him to be a prophet. So Jesus tells them a parable saying:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,” (Matthew 22:2)

The King in the parable is God the Father in heaven. The Son is God's beloved Son, Christ Jesus. The wedding feast is God's outpouring of eternal salvation for the sake of Jesus' innocent suffering and death on the cross. It's the wedding Feast of the Lamb with His bride, the Church. (cf: Revelation 19:6–9)

Apparently, the King had already sent out ***“Save the Date”*** notices, because the text says He sent His servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast to come. They knew in advance they were invited but now they're called to the feast – but they wouldn't come. They were not willing to come. You can ignore your friends if you want. You can spurn your second cousin twice removed. But you don't ignore the King. You don't reject the gracious invitation and gifts of the King. But these guests would not come.

This is a picture of Old Testament Israel. The servants are God's prophets. They were sent out to proclaim the good news of the love and mercy of God. They invited the children of Israel to trust God and join Him in eternal life. But, as the text tells us, they wouldn't come. They were caught

up in their own false idols and desires of the flesh and didn't have time for the King. The King had given them everything they could ever want, but they had neither the time for the King nor the desire to receive any more of His gifts. They rejected His love and generosity.

But – the King didn't abandon them. He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (cf: Psalm 86:15) Just like in last week's Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard, He kept sending others... more servants to announce the feast, saying:

“See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.” (Matthew 22:4)

It's a lavish feast as Isaiah describes in our Old Testament text where the Lord of hosts prepares the feast of salvation in heaven. (cf: Isaiah 25:6-9) You don't have to bring a gift. You don't have to bring your own bottle. The King has provided everything:

“... a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.” (Isaiah 25:6)

Who wouldn't want to come to this banquet? Why would anyone reject the free gift of salvation? Sadly, the answer is – they don't want it. They don't want salvation of God's terms. On their own terms – sure! But not on God's terms. And it's just like you and me.

You get caught up in your own false idols and desires of the flesh and believe you don't have time for the King. The King has given you everything you could ever want: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. But oftentimes, you and I have neither the time for the King nor the desire to receive any more of His gifts. You have time for everything else under the sky – but you don't have time for prayer and meditation on God's Word... no time for His gifts delivered in Word and Sacrament.

In the parable, the longsuffering King finally becomes angry. It's what happens when you spurn the generosity and the gifts of the king. Those who were originally invited to the feast were declared to be not worthy because they shamed and dishonored the King and His Son. The King sends His troops to destroy the city, foretelling of God's righteous anger that He would pour out on the temple and people of Jerusalem when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, only forty years following Jesus death and Resurrection.

Unbelief and opposition to Jesus and His ministry brought God's righteous judgment down upon their heads. They should have repented and believed John the Baptist when he proclaimed the way of righteousness in Jesus. (cf: Matthew 21:28–32) They should have recognized His miracles were works of God. But they rejected the Stone who has become the Cornerstone of Christ's Church. (cf. Matthew 21:37-42; Acts 4:11)

In the parable the generous King still wants to give. He wants to give of His riches. He wants to give a party. So:

“[The King] said to his servants, ‘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.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.” (Matthew 22:8-10)

At last, the multitudes are flocking to the wedding feast, both good and bad. With the feast underway, the parable ends on a confusing and tragic note. When the King enters the wedding feast to look over the celebration, He finds a man without a wedding garment. When the King confronts the man, asking how he got into the feast without a proper garment, the man is silent. He offers no excuses and is unrepentant. It’s a slap in the face of the generosity and righteousness of the King, dishonoring both the King and His Son. So the King orders his servants to bind the man hand and foot, and cast him into the outermost darkness away from the celebration of the Son’s wedding feast. Jesus concludes the parable saying:

“For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14)

In the parable, to be “***not worthy***” (cf: Matthew 22:8) is to dishonor and reject the King and His wedding feast for His Son. Scholars debate what is the meaning of the wedding garment – the point is – this man without a proper garment was deliberately dishonoring the King and His son. He stands among the guests insisting that he can attend the banquet on his own merit and on his own terms.

What this parable is telling us and warning us about is that we all have the capacity to mess up our place at the wedding feast by abusing God’s generosity and grace that got us here. It is the King alone who chose you for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (cf: 1 Peter 2:9) You and I dishonor and spurn not only the King but also His only begotten Son when we forget who paid the price in our place for entrance, and exactly what it cost Him to bring us into the wedding feast. Luther describes the who and the what perfectly in his explanation to the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed where he writes:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. (SC Art II)

Who wouldn’t want to come to this banquet? Why would anyone reject the free gift of salvation? Sadly, the answer is – many don’t want it. Many don’t want salvation of God’s terms. But you, brothers and sisters in Christ, have been called into faith by the Gospel and have been united with Christ in Baptism. To paraphrase St Paul:

“... Christ loved ...[you] and gave himself up for [you], ²⁶ that he might sanctify [you], having cleansed [you] by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present [you] to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that [you] might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25–27)

The righteousness of Christ is your wedding garment. He forgives you all of your sins... your sins of false idols, the desires of the flesh, and believing you don't have time for the King. The King has given you everything you could ever want: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He has destroyed the monster of uncertainty because by your God given faith in Christ, you have certainty of eternal salvation. Luther writes:

Let us thank God, therefore, that we have been delivered from this monster of uncertainty and that now we can believe for a certainty that the Holy Spirit is crying and issuing that sigh too deep for words in our hearts. And this is our foundation: The Gospel commands us to look, not at our own good deeds or perfection but at God Himself as He promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator. (LW 26. 387)

The same Holy Spirit empowers you to flee from your sins. He enables you to trust in the certainty of your salvation and that you:

“Rejoice in the Lord always...” “...[and] not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:4, 6)

He strengthens you to keep Christian virtues, the fundamental ideals of life according to God's design, in the forefront of your mind so that they inspire and guide all that you do by thinking and meditating on:

“... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, ... any excellence, ... anything worthy of praise...” (Philippians 4:8–9)

The Parable of the Wedding Feast a word of judgment and warning against the religious leaders of Israel and indirectly to you and me so that we don't spurn the King. But it's also a Gospel illustration of the certainty of God's generosity and divine grace in His rule and reign in Christ Jesus for you and all who believe.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.