

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
13 October, Anno Domini 2024  
St. Matthew 22:1-14

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

Honored guests of the feast of salvation,

When you throw a party - when you work hard making sure the house is spotless, when you blow the grocery budget in order to provide your guests with the best hor devours, fall-off-the-bones ribs, and drinks to complement it all - you want people to come. They knew you were planning a blowout party, they knew you wanted them to come, you gave them the date ahead of time, they excitedly said "Sure. We'll be there. We wouldn't miss it for the world." And then, when the time comes, and you anxiously wait at home, excited to celebrate with your friends. But no one shows. The food is getting cold. You start making phone calls, texting everyone who promised to make it and all of them come up with some excuse why they have to back out. You tell them you understand and that it's no big deal. But it is. You're hurt. You're angry. If you had known they weren't coming, that no one really wanted to celebrate with you, you wouldn't have gone to all the expense and trouble. You asked nothing in return. You didn't expect them to bring a dish to share. They rejected your graciousness. They rejected you.

Notice what this parable is all about. It's less about the feast and more about the king and how things work in the kingdom of heaven. That's extremely important. This isn't about the kingdom of the world. This is about what is going on in the church. This parable of warning is not directed to the unbeliever but to us, to everyone who bears the name of Christ. But in so far as it's a warning, it is also a fresh reminder of the true nature of God's kingdom, a reminder of how any of us become and remain members of that kingdom.

In the kingdom of heaven, God the Father does all the work. He alone makes all the preparations for the feast. He toils. He sacrifices. Not begrudgingly but gladly and joyously. That's the way it must be and that's the way God wants it. He loves to bless. He loves to give away His kingdom and it's blessings for nothing. He wants someone to enjoy

everything that is His. He wants someone else to benefit from His riches. But what God offers isn't wealth or power. He isn't handing over parcels of land or fabulous vacations. This is a marriage feast. The Son of God is about to take a bride. Often times, marriages at that time were viewed in terms of how the bride might benefit the family financially or socially. But that isn't how it works in the kingdom of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven, it is the bride who reaps all the benefits. The Father has chosen a bride for His Son, not for political or financial gain, but because He wants the bride to have the kingdom of His Son. Jesus is about to win for Himself a bride by dying for her, by buying her back from death, cleansing her from every spot and wrinkle of sin. Jesus has chosen His beloved to whom He will cling, who will be joined to Him, upon whom He will lavish His love and care.

Now those who were invited first to the king's celebration I'm sure had planned on coming. They were excited in the beginning. It sounded great. They wanted to be a part of it. But in the end, they despised the invitation. They were too busy with other things. They were too busy with their own works. They thought they would benefit more if they worked their new oxen, tilled their fields, or cared for their own wife. Even here in the world we recognize how foolish such a refusal would be. If the President of the United States, whoever he is, or the King of England invited you to dinner, you wouldn't say no. Those excuses that seemed legitimate suddenly look completely foolish. How much more foolish when it is God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? And more than that, what He invites you to is the banquet of salvation, the full and free forgiveness of all your sins, the victory feast of Christ Jesus over YOUR sin and death!

Yet how often we do refuse. How often we do reject God's mercy for our own self-made good works? How often do we turn our nose up or simply refuse to believe that salvation is a completely free gift that can't be earned, that we can't ever accomplish by our own work? Repent. There is no work that you could ever do, no amount of business, moral living, praying, or serving that will help get you into the kingdom of heaven. In this kingdom the benefits all come from the same place - the gracious working of God the Father through the marriage of His Son, Jesus Christ, to His beloved bride, the Holy Christian Church. This is a kingdom of pure grace. There is no room for your doing, only receiving. In truth, you are invited to be a part of the bride, one of the blessed ones upon whom Christ Jesus lavishes the kingdom of His Father - a kingdom of forgiveness, a kingdom of life, a kingdom of salvation. Where Adam gave only a rib to create Eve, Jesus

has poured out of His side Blood and water, grounding Baptism and the Lord's Supper in His sacrificial death for you. From these precious sacraments, Christ makes for Himself a holy and spotless bride, a bride that had once been covered in shame and the nakedness of her sin. But no longer. The free grace of God in Christ Jesus has made for Himself a new people, born not of flesh and blood or dead useless works of the Law, but a new people born of water and the Spirit, the merciful, undeserved work of God.

But this kingdom will not be shared with those who still cling to their own righteousness, who take some comfort in their striving. If the gracious invitation to the marriage feast of Christ, this banquet of Body and Blood through which you receive every blessing of God's kingdom isn't sufficient for you, if your heart still takes comfort in your own doing, if you still will not let go of your own merits and your own input, if you allow the temporary riches of this life to steal your heart from your heavenly Bridegroom and the gifts He has prepared for you by His death, be warned. Listen again to what happened to those first invited. The anger of the king burned against them and He sent His troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city who had rejected the King's messengers. They refused the invitation to His grace and so refused the One who had graciously invited them to their destruction.

God's kingdom is a kingdom of pure grace. If we seek an audience with the Father in any other way than through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will be refused. If our hearts are found dressed in the delusions of self-righteousness, rather than in the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, which the king has provided, we will be bound, hand and feet and cast into eternal damnation.

God's desire is that you be in His kingdom, taking the place He has prepared for you around His banquet table. His greatest joy is in saving sinners and filling His banquet hall with those who know that they don't deserve to be there, who know that they have done nothing to deserve the feast of salvation, who know that they deserve to be outcasts, but who nonetheless receive the invitation with joy. They go not on the basis of their own worth but because of the mercy and love and graciousness of the king.

Which brings us to the question of the man found without the wedding

garment. Who is he? Why, when he accepted the invitation, did the king still throw him out? What is this garment that is so important? One might argue that it is the garment of Christ's righteousness and I don't believe that that would be totally incorrect but I think it is a bit more nuanced than that so let us meditate on that part of the parable for a moment.

The wedding garment was a festive and joyful garment, it was the outward way in which the guests would express their rejoicing in the marriage. And, at that time, if you did not have access to such a garment, the host would most certainly provide you with one. But this man was found wanting - not because he couldn't obtain a garment, but because he refused it. What is that but to say "I will come, but I take no joy in what is happening, I will not be clothed in the garments of joy, the outward dress that is appropriate to such a feast and a gift."?

When considered in the light of St. Paul's words warning us to be careful about how we walk, not getting drunk but being filled with the Spirit, speaking the truth and having mouths filled with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and giving thanks to God, it is hard not to see that this garment is the sanctified life of one who is filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. To be invited to the wedding feast of salvation is to lay aside the ugly, bitter, angry, selfish ways of the sinful world. It is to be clothed in the joy of your redemption and the peace of no longer having to earn your way into God's favor. It is to be lifted out of the sewage of the world's way of thinking and its pleasures. Now, instead of being clothed in the filthy rags of our sin, as the redeemed we are to be clothed in the joy of the Holy Spirit and filled with a zeal for the things of Christ. We are to exercise ourselves constantly in works of love that are befitting one who shares in all the blessings of redemption.

It is neither appropriate nor acceptable in the eyes of God if, having been brought into the feast, we continue to walk as those who remain in the kingdom of sin and death. The wedding feast is a feast of forgiveness and unity. We are therefore to seek with every fiber of our being to forgive one another, bear with one another, and maintain the unity of the Spirit. We are to gladly and freely help our neighbor in his need without counting the cost. We must rejoice to speak and hear the Word of God daily in our homes, learning the Small Catechism and committing Scripture to our memory so that our speech is shaped by God's speech. We ought to excise from our mouths the filthy speech, lies, and crude joking of the world. We ought to

rejoice with every opportunity to hear the public preaching of Christ and receive the feast of our Savior's Body and Blood which bestows His life and forgiveness up on us. We are to lay aside sloth and sorrow and bitterness and instead rejoice to walk in the love and mercy of Christ, eager to do the work God has given us to do not as embittered slaves but as willing children who love to do the will of their heavenly Father.

This the man refused because he refused what the King and His feast were all about. And the one who follows in that man's footsteps, imagining that he can be in the kingdom while remaining in his evil, will meet the same terrible end as those who rejected the invitation from the beginning. So let us encourage one another in the joy of our salvation. Let us fervently pray that the Holy Spirit would fill our hearts and minds so that clothed in the righteousness of Christ we might also be clothed in the joy of Christ and be filled with a fervent desire to use the time given to us to extol the name of Christ in all that we say and do so that others might see our good works and praise the gracious Name of our God and Father.

Come, for the wedding feast is ready. All the preparations have been made. The Lamb has been slain. Your wedding garment has been given to you and God the Father has invited you to the banquet of your salvation.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.