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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 25, 2020
21st after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 25:6-9, Philippians 4:4-13

Hymns: 23; 281; 279:1-3; 48:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 22:1-14

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.” ’ ⁵But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*. ⁷But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ ¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹²So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are called, but few *are* chosen.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO:

It was getting right down to it. It was only a couple of days before Jesus would enter into His passion, being taken by His enemies, delivered into the hands of the Romans, and suffer and die on the cross. It was only a little earlier that day that the leaders of the Jews had challenged Jesus regarding His authority to teach people, to heal people. The parable before us this morning is the conclusion of Jesus' response to this challenge of His authority.

In this parable Jesus addresses the problem of the failure of the leaders of the Jews and ultimately the vast majority of the Jewish people to see and believe that these signs and wonders were in effect the answer to their question concerning Jesus' authority to teach, and minister to the people. The signs confirmed that Jesus was the Christ promised of old.

Things were coming to a head, and the God of heaven would use the hard hearts of Jesus' enemies to fulfill His plan of salvation for the redemption of a sinful world. God's plan culminates with a great celebration of the triumph of His people, His Church on earth. The people of the Jews were chosen to be God's holy people, called out from the world; they possessed the Holy Scriptures, the very oracles of God. To them the Christ was born into the world.

It is in light of these facts that we are led to evaluate the honor now bestowed also upon us of being --

THEME: Invited to the Wedding Feast of God's Son!

First let us consider:

I. The Richness of the Grace of that Feast.

In this parable Jesus speaks of a wedding for the king's son. This in itself was a picture loaded with meaning for the people of that time. People knew what kind of occasion this signified. King Herod's birthday parties were extravaganzas. If a king was putting together his own son's wedding celebration that would be over the top! We all know the expression, "A feast fit for a King!"

Now let's capture Jesus' meaning. Without doubt the King in the parable is God the Father Himself. The son in the parable is Jesus, the eternal Son of God. It is a common enough allusion of Scripture that the Church is the bride of Christ. The wedding feast would be a grand celebration of the culmination of the grace of our salvation.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we read how the Spirit led Isaiah to use this picture of a grand feast to picture the wonders that God has prepared for those whom He loves. This is where our thoughts should go in considering the parable of the king's marriage feast for his son. What God has prepared for His people is no pot luck affair with a lot of tasty but nothing fancy hot dishes. This is a carefully planned and prepared meal of the finest delicacies of **spiritual** foods. The main course is the Bread of Life which is Christ Himself.

When our souls feed on Jesus we receive the exact nourishment needed to breathe life into dead souls. The Lord speaks to us in Holy Scripture of the grace of forgiveness that overwhelms even the grossest sin or the deepest debt. The Lord brings to His people grace and love and forgiveness that leads to eternal life in His presence.

We find among these rich delicacies God's care for His people. He watches out for His people. He does not leave them or forsake them, not even in life's darkest hours. He continues to assure us that "*there is ... no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 8:1) We are brought into the wedding feast of His Son as we enter heaven. We know we will leave behind all of sin's baggage. There will be no more pain or sickness or sorrow or death. (Revelation 21:4) All tears, all disappointments will be wiped away forevermore. We will receive from the Lord's hand only kindness and love, peace and joy.

To be invited to such a feast of the marriage of the King's Son is a great honor. To characterize it as "the thrill of a lifetime" is to sell it short of its true value. This was the invitation that was extended to the people of the Jews as a nation, including its leaders, the chief priests the scribes and the Pharisees. Let us consider how it came to pass that this is also an invitation extended to us as we consider:

II. The Varied Responses to a Gracious Invitation.

We read in Jesus' parable:

Matthew 22:2-7 "A certain king ... arranged a marriage for his son, ³ and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴ Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding." ' ⁵ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶ And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*.

The initial response was very simply, "*They were not willing to come.*" (v.3) This is a king's banquet for his son's wedding, and the people he invited weren't willing to come! That was incomprehensible! It required a follow up. More servants were sent. They are told by those invited that they had other, better things to do. "*One went to his farm, another to his business.*" (v.5) Imagine telling the king that you have better things to do! Still others reacted with violence! The messengers sent out by the king were abused and killed! They were killed for simply delivering a message of invitation to a wedding feast!

Jesus' parable presents the message of how the Lord's own servants would be scorned and slighted, and then even abused and martyred for the sake of the gospel. Martyrdom began with the stoning of Stephen because his testimony to the gospel of Christ angered the Sanhedrin. Stephen was simply calling the leaders of the Jews to repentance. In other words, Stephen was inviting the leaders of the Jews to the wedding feast of God's Son. He was the

first to be killed. It wasn't long and the Apostle James was beheaded. So it began and so the persecution of God's messengers has continued down to our day.

Their unbelieving response cost the people of the Jews dearly. Remember, Jesus presented this parable only a couple of days before His crucifixion, a couple of days before the crowds would cry out together, "*His blood be on us and on our children.*" (Matthew 27:25) What Jesus depicted in this parable was the judgment that would befall Jerusalem forty years later when the Roman legions would level the city of Jerusalem, and so many lives would be lost.

The lesson for us is clear. The Lord in His grace has reached out to us with a wondrous invitation to the wedding feast of Christ. He has done this in response to the rejection of the invitation by those who had been so richly blessed spiritually, and yet spurned the blessings of the Lord's calling. Jesus sent out His messengers of grace into all the world to preach the gospel, and call us to repentance. That we as a people have received this gracious invitation; that we, by the powerful calling of the Holy Spirit have come to faith in Jesus is all a marvel of God's grace. Let's not take it for granted. Let's not diminish its importance in our lives. This is the invitation to the wedding feast of the Son of God. This is eternal life we are talking about!

When anyone regards the affairs of this world, be it work, business, or recreation as more important than the Word of God, they are denigrating the importance of the Word in their lives. When people need to do their grocery shopping or their lawn mowing, or their laundry at the time that has been dedicated for the Lord, the time when they have the opportunity to grow in understanding of the grace of God in Christ, they are plain and simple dismissing the gospel's significance as of little importance for their own lives and for the lives of their children.

Recently, I was asked how generational slip happens within the church. You can see from Old Testament Scriptures how prevalent this has been throughout history. It remains a real and present danger! It can't always be explained other than evidence of our sinful flesh. However, regularly neglecting the gathering of ourselves around the Word of God is a slam dunk cause of

hastening such a slip in church involvement and faith. It impresses upon the minds of the young how **un**important we ought to regard the gospel of Christ. We are setting up ourselves and our children and our nation to be among those whom the Lord found unwilling to come to the wedding feast of His Son. You know the conclusion of that is not good.

Now, for those invited and entering the wedding feast it is important to be found wearing:

III. The Proper Apparel for Such a Glorious Event.

In Jesus' parable Jesus makes the point of the magnitude of the grace of God in that messengers were sent out into the highways to invite whoever might be found to come to the wedding feast of the King's Son. In the parable Jesus says that the wedding hall was filled with guests. Jesus specified, "*both bad and good.*" (v.10) Isn't that amazing! We see people's outward appearance and we judge them by class or by the things they have done as being worthy or unworthy. It is our automatic, subconscious reaction to people. People who are drug dealers, or abusers of children and women, or murderers, or just filthy, smelly, street people, these aren't the ones we are inclined to reach out to with the gospel. We are so quick to forget the words of Isaiah: "*We are **all** as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags.*" (Isaiah 64:6) Or the words of the Apostle Paul, "*There is no difference, for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23) Or the words of the psalmist, "*There is none who does good, NO, not one!*" (Psalm 14:3) We need to take a good look into the mirror of the law of God and see for ourselves that we are among those who are bad. Indeed, we should join Paul in confessing of ourselves, I am chief among sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15) When we forget to do that, (and by the way this is one of the things we tend to forget about it when we neglect coming to church where together with our fellow Christians we humble ourselves before the Lord and confess our sins. How often do we do that at home? Really!) When we forget just how sinful we are, we are inclined to think we must look pretty good before the Lord because of the fine things we do in supporting church and charity, and being kind to other people, and so forth.

Jesus didn't let that notion go unanswered either. In His parable there was one guest who attempted to slip into the wedding feast in

his own spiritual apparel. He was not wearing the wedding garment provided for all wedding guests to wear, the garment that covered the filth and stink of sinful man, but rather adorned them with the brilliance of the righteousness of Christ.

In the parable it didn't go unnoticed that this guest had failed to put on the wedding garment. He was forcefully removed from the wedding feast. Well, he wasn't just thrown out on his ear; he was bound hand and foot and thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (v.13) Such is the lot of those who deceive themselves, thinking that they are acceptable on their own before the Lord. May God save us from such false and tragic ideas!

We have been given the righteousness of Christ to wear that we may be found acceptable in the sight of God. How blessed we are to be so adorned with that righteousness which avails before God, that comes to us **from** God as a free gift of His grace! Treasure this grace. Wear Jesus' righteousness proudly, for while we have nothing of which to be proud within ourselves, of Christ we may boast, that others may hear and know the grace of salvation that is found in Jesus' name.

Jesus concluded this response to the leaders of the Jews by saying, "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" (v.14) Don't forget that. Don't forget that while the gospel invitation has gone out into all the world it is a very, very special gift of God's grace that the Holy Spirit has called you to faith, that you **have been chosen** to be a child of God and an heir of everlasting life. We look forward to the day when we shall walk into the heavenly courtyards of the King and join in the wedding feast of the King's Son.

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans15:13)