

The Second Sunday after Michaelmas/Trinity 20 – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 22:1-14: “How Will You Prepare for the King’s Feast?”
October 8/9, 2022 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, who prepared all things for our salvation, You called us to the marriage feast of Your dear Son, the Bridegroom of our souls; we humbly ask You, cleanse and direct our hearts, that we may not reject Your gracious invitation, but willingly follow Your Word and, being clothed by faith with the garment of righteousness, obtain eternal life with all Your elect; through the same Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, companion altar book for *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 168)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “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. / “Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. 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. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. / “Then he 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. / “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. / “Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who graciously calls you to the feast of His salvation and clothes you in the garments of His righteousness, dear fellow redeemed:

Black SUVs pull up to your house, and professional-looking folks step out, walk up to your door, and ring the bell. So you brush the crumbs off your shirt, check your hair, and go to open the door. It turns out that these people have been sent by the governor. They hand you an invitation and tell you that you are personally invited to be the honored guest at a banquet one week from now.

Once the shock wears off, you realize you have some preparations to make. You can't show up in blue jeans, so you'll have to go shopping for formal attire. And it's about time for a haircut. When the day comes, you leave your house and head for the car. You feel a little awkward being dressed up so much, and you kind of hope the neighbors don't see you. But when you get to the banquet, you are glad you made the preparations you did. You look like you belong. It's going to be a great evening.

But let's back up. Maybe you don't think much of the governor. When the personal invitation arrives, and you are told you will be the honored guest, you let it be known that you are not interested in going. You would rather do just about anything else, and they can tell their boss you said so. Then you shut the door with a little extra force and go back to your couch and your crumbs.

That's how the invited guests reacted to the king's invitation when the wedding feast for his son was ready. Some of them did even worse. Not only did they reject the invitation, but they also killed the servants of the king! When Jesus told this part of His parable, He was referring to His people, the Israelites. They were the people of God's promise. They were the ones from whom the Savior would come.

But so often, they lost sight of this promise. They chased after the gods of the world. Out of love for His people, God sent prophets to call them back to repentance and faith (ex. 2Ch. 24:19). They didn't have to lose their place at the wedding feast. But the people did not want to listen. They *"seized [the Lord's] servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them."* This happened to more than a few prophets. So eventually God sent the Babylonians to *"[destroy] those murderers and [burn] their city."*

Jesus' words are a sobering message for all of us. There are severe consequences for ignoring the Lord's invitation and for mistreating His servants. St. Paul writes, *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap"* (Gal. 6:7). The people of the world think their work and their possessions are far more important than the Word of God. They don't need the Church! They don't need someone pushing religion on them. If there is a god, they figure they will come out better with Him than all the hypocritical Christians. But God will judge them for ignoring His Word when it was right there for them. He wanted to save them, but they rejected Him.

We see how generous God is with His invitations by the king sending his servants to gather up as many as they could find out on the road, whether bad or good. The people whom God invites to His feast of salvation are not just the outwardly good, not just the nice ones and the generous ones. He invites sinners of all kinds to come to His table. If we could interview the saints in heaven about their past—which more than likely they will not remember in that place of blessedness and perfection—we might be shocked that they are even there.

How could God let people like them in? Because none of us gets to heaven by our own personal goodness. We get to heaven by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. Jesus told the religious leaders, *"the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you"* (Mat. 21:31). Shocking! Why is that the case? Because *"the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed [God],"* while

the religious leaders did not (v. 32). The religious leaders thought their personal goodness was good enough.

Jesus shows us how empty our own righteousness is by the guest in the wedding hall who came without a wedding garment on. This wasn't a matter of poverty. The king would have gladly provided a change of clothes to this guest. What happened was that the guest refused it. He wanted to attend the wedding feast on his own terms. He thought he was better than the king. He thought he deserved to be there. And what happened to him? He was bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness.

This is a picture for us of why our practice of Closed Communion is so important. We insist that all who commune here are properly prepared for what they receive. Each one of you knows how to prepare. You come with humble and repentant hearts, knowing that you have sinned and wanting to do better. You trust that Jesus' promise of forgiveness is true, and that He actually forgives your sins through the Supper of His body and blood. You come to this feast wearing the righteousness He provides you by faith.

You are also aware that you could receive Communion to your harm. If you are not truly sorry for your sins, if you do not want to stop sinning, if you do not believe that Jesus gives you what He says He does in Communion, then Jesus comes to you as Judge rather than as Savior. Our King does not invite us to Holy Communion on our own terms. It is not *our* Supper; it is *His* Supper—the *Lord's* Supper. If we do not talk with non-members about what they believe, and if we don't strive for real unity on the basis of God's Word, we will be guilty of confirming them in their errors and sins. We will make them think they can come before God whether they are dressed in the proper attire or not.

But isn't it enough that a person says he or she is a Christian or a Lutheran? Can't we leave it up to them to decide if they should come forward? Let's think of it this way: Suppose your favorite football team is having a special event for its fans. Everyone comes wearing the same colors. They share the same confidence in their team, the same loyalty. They know everything about the team's history, the team's failures and victories, the team's traditions. It's like a family.

But then a group of fans shows up wearing another team's colors, maybe the colors of the rival team. They have very different traditions. They have different chants and cheers; they sing different songs. And they expect to be let right in to this special event. Of course they meet some resistance at the door. "Why can't we come in?" they ask. "Don't we love the same sport? Aren't we all football fans? Isn't one team just as good as another?"

We do not believe that one church is just as good as another. The different churches around us do not teach the same thing. They do not look at the Bible in the same way, and that's even true of other Lutherans. Out of love for God and His Word, we insist that all who commune at our altar be willing to learn what the Bible teaches and express their full agreement with it. Then we have true unity, and that is a great blessing! You know that the people to the left of you and to the right of you at the Communion rail share the same faith. They are fellow believers—members with you in the family of God.

We are called together to partake of the King's feast. The King, our heavenly Father, sent the invitation to us who were far away from Him, lost in the darkness of our own sin and unbelief. He called us to attend the wedding feast, to enter the kingdom of His Son, to receive the gifts of His righteousness and salvation.

Many are invited to the feast of God's Son, "*many are called, but few are chosen.*" This should be very humbling for us. We do not deserve to receive the rich blessings of God. By nature, we were opposed to His rule, but He changed our minds and hearts by His grace. We were dressed in the filthy rags of our sin, and He made us fit to stand before Him by washing away our sin and clothing us in the perfection of Jesus.

Not one of us is worthy to receive the body and blood of our Savior in Holy Communion here on earth or to join Him at His eternal feast in heaven. But He warmly invites us and welcomes us. He knows our hearts, our struggles, our sins, and He calls us to be cleansed again by His blood, covered again in His righteousness.

"*Come to the wedding feast,*" He says. "The table is set for you and for all who hear the invitation with repentance and faith. Come and delight yourself with rich food! Come and be filled! Be strengthened and satisfied!" And we humbly reply:

Jesus, Bread of Life, I pray Thee,
Let me gladly here obey Thee.
By Thy love I am invited;
Be Thy love with love requited.
From this Supper let me measure,
Lord, how vast and deep love's treasure.
Through the gifts Thou here dost give me
As Thy guest in heav'n receive me.
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #328, v. 9)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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