

Matthew 22:1-14

**“Come to the Wedding Feast!”**  
Pentecost 20 (Proper 23 A)

October 15, 2023

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

To the chief priests, elders of the people, and to everyone else in attendance, Jesus spoke: **“Tell those who are invited ... Come to the wedding feast”** (Matthew 22:4).

It is amazing how much teaching Jesus did in a single day. Again, for the third week in a row, we are hearing Jesus teach from the temple grounds on the Tuesday before His death on the cross. We are nearing the end of His earthly ministry. Tensions are mounting; hate is increasing. It is clear that the Jewish religious leaders of God’s own people have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. They have not only rejected Jesus, but they are actively plotting how to arrest Him, and ultimately put Him to death.

But Jesus isn’t finished yet. His time of salvation would not be until Friday. So, Jesus tells a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven – it’s not only about eternity, but God’s Kingdom now as it exists already here on earth. It is as if Jesus were speaking from the perspective of Judgment Day and looking back over the history of God’s people.

In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus likens this feast to a King – God the Father, who prepared a wedding banquet, which is eternal life in heaven. And God’s Kingdom on earth is compared to all that happens in between. The King sends His servants to those who had been invited to the banquet – the Jews, His Old Testament people – to tell them that all was ready and that they should now come.

But they refused. These called people were just like the wicked tenants in the vineyard from the preceding parable. Those wicked tenants refused to give the Owner His share of the crop. Instead, they beat, murdered, and stoned each servant who came for the Owner’s share of the crop, including the murder of the Owner’s Son in hopes of gaining the inheritance of the vineyard.

In today’s parable, the King sends His servants to invite His called people to the wedding feast of His Son. Now, this invitation should not have been a surprise. The King wasn’t inviting His guests out of the blue with only a couple hours of preparation. You see, those who were invited had been already called.

But at first, those called paid no attention to the King. But this King is ***“merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”*** (Psalm 86:15), so He sent out 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’”*** (Matthew 22:4).

Here, the King is giving out even more details about His gracious wedding banquet. He has prepared several of His finest cattle. He has prepared a rich food of the best beef, and the finest of wines. Everything is prepared to perfection!

Nevertheless, even after the second invitation, His guests continue to refuse to come. But this time, instead of completely ignoring the King’s invitation, some at least give reasons. But each reason was just being dishonest. Each reason to refuse the invitation was because they had a low opinion of the King and His Son.

One went to his field – *representing the agricultural cares of this fallen world*. Another went to his business – *representing the commercial cares of this fallen world*. Again, these excuses were not really excuses at all, but each displayed their opinion of the King and His Son, while at the same time showing their high opinion of earthly things, worldly things. They chose works righteousness rather than a King’s gracious banquet hall full of savory flavors and aromas of 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).

By refusing to come, these called guests insulted the dignity of the King and His Son who had counted on their attendance by graciously preparing this savory feast for them. But at least some were polite. They were wrong, but at least they were polite.

Still some others who were invited took a whole different direction by seizing the King’s servants, treating them shamefully, and murdering them (Matthew 22:6). Although the feast is ready, the King will not and cannot allow the murderers of His servants to go unpunished.

Now, God may be ***“merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,”*** but there will come a time when His mercy and grace will run out. This time is known as the Last Day – Judgment Day. At that time, there will be nothing more we can do. There will be no more time for repentance and forgiveness. For these who were called and invited and refused the invitation, this was their Judgment Day.

Due to their hardness of heart, due to their hate toward the King and His Son, and due to the way they treated His servants, the King was enraged. So, He sent His troops, executes them, and burns the city to the ground (Matthew 22:7).

Just like the wicked tenants who refused to give the Owner of the vineyard His share, these who were called to the wedding feast and refused the King's invitation were destroyed. And in a matter of years, this divine judgment would come upon Jerusalem in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple. This divine judgment came because the Jewish religious leaders have, by and large, rejected God's Son and the reign of God present in His Words and deeds.

Despite their refusal to come at the King's invitation, the King desires that His banquet hall be filled anyway. If the first to be called will not come, He will show His grace and generosity to others! So, the King turns His attention to a new group of people – which will include both believing Jews and Gentiles. The King says 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”*** (Matthew 22:8-9).

Lone and behold, these invited guests actually come! And guess what, those who came were ***“both bad and good”*** (Matthew 22:10), so the wedding hall was filled with guests!

Everyone is called to the feast! Now, these “bad and good” represent the Church here on earth. These bad people are the hypocrites, who come to church, recite the liturgy, and sing the hymns, but refuse to believe by not living out a life of faith. They withhold forgiveness. They don't fear God's wrath. But in the end, God always sorts out His faithful from the unfaithful by separating the true believers from the false believers.

So, like Jesus said previously to the Jewish religious authorities, ***“The tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you”*** (Matthew 21:31). The tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before the Jewish authorities only because they admit they are sinners in need of forgiveness. They enter because they are penitent sinners who desire to be in the presence of the King and His Son. They enter because they need to be saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Now, the banquet hall is filled! But the parable is not over. ***“When the King came in to look at the guests, He saw there a man who had no wedding garment”*** (Matthew 22:11). Sternly and politely, the King asked this man, ***“Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?”*** (Matthew 22:12). The man was speechless.

Now, the banquet is the King’s, and the hospitality is His. He has the authority to receive and the authority to reject. So, when He sees a man who is not dressed in the *“garment of a wedding,”* He naturally confronts that man, and asks how it was possible for him to gain entrance.

For so much of my life, I have heard this “wedding garment” preached that it was custom in those days for the king to provide a wedding garment – as a sort of ticket to get into the wedding banquet. I’m sure you have heard that preached. In fact, I have preached that in the past. But I have since come to understand another way on interpreting this wedding garment. You see, according to Concordia Seminary Professor Jeff Gibbs, we really don’t know too much about Jewish First Century wedding customs.

But what do we know? Well, this “wedding garment” likely refers to “a normal, clean, festive garment.” We might say, “Church clothes” or your “Sunday Best.” So, a wedding garment is just your best outfit. So, a wedding garment could be a tux, a polo, plaid shirt, a gown. It could be wearing slacks or blue jeans. But what matters is that the garment is clean.

So, there is not just one type of garment here. But this person, who is without a wedding garment, is apparently dressed in dirty clothing. In other words, this man has shamed the King. This man is not treating this like a wedding feast. He flat out doesn’t care. He’s like the others who refused to come.

And when asked about it, this man has nothing to say. He doesn’t say that he’s sorry. He doesn’t say, *“Please forgive me.”* He just has nothing to say. He’s speechless. So, what should this man have said? What if he had said: “Please forgive me, since I snuck in under false pretenses.” Maybe, then, the King would have welcomed him.

So, to be without a wedding garment is to be without true faith. It is to insult the King and His Son. To be without a wedding garment means to oppose the claims of the Son of God as the Lamb of God who has come to take all sins upon Himself. This is what brought God’s Son to Jerusalem to be rejected, to suffer, to be crucified, and to rise from the dead.

Then the King said to His attendants, ***“Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”*** (Matthew 22:13). To this Jesus concludes: ***“For many are called, but few are chosen”*** (Matthew 22:14).

You see, called is to be invited, but not all those called end up believing.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast ends on a grim note. We cannot ignore that. So, by rejecting the King and His Son, this is what happens. So, we can't treat His wedding feast like it's going to McDonald's or Burger King, but as a dress rehearsal for heaven when death is swallowed up forever (Isaiah 25:8).

Jesus is speaking this parable not only to the Jewish religious leaders of Israel, but also to you and me. So, this parable serves as a warning to us, since sham religiousness is an ever-present danger for every believer. Each Sunday morning or Monday evening, the King calls you to His banquet, but how often do you choose earthly things rather than experience a foretaste of His heavenly feast to come? At each Divine Service, the King invites you to rest, reflect on His Word and receive His forgiveness in order to strengthen your faith in Him and His Son.

How many of you have heard or even said, *“I believe in God! I am a Christian!”*? And yet, these same people often want to fit into the society of this fallen sinful world and in doing so, reject the King's invitation. Just think about all those who claim to be followers of Christ, and yet support the evil of elective abortion by denying God's command to be fruitful and multiply or those who deny how God created mankind as male and female. The fallen world – *led by its prince Satan* – wants us to focus on your sinful wants and your sinful desires, rather than God's will for you and me.

This parable challenges us to ask ourselves, “Have I put on the wedding garment? Am I here on my own terms or God's terms? Am I seeking to have a share in God's banquet in the way He wants – *by grace through faith in Christ alone who died for my sins* – or on my own?”

This is the question. And this is a life and death question – for the Lord will ultimately destroy those who reject Him.

There is only one way to be found at the eternal banquet hall and it is to heed His invitation. This way is to cling to Jesus and Him crucified for your sins. Upon that cross, He won for you His robe of righteousness, which He first gave to you in Holy Baptism. In Baptism, Jesus covered you with His righteousness. So, all your materialism, your earthly mindedness, all your sins – they are all paid for and covered by Christ and His righteousness.

Until that Last Day, God’s mercy continues. Today, He continues to urgently invite you and all people to His banquet hall. Through the preaching and teaching of His Holy Word, by the mouths of His messengers through the ministry of His Church, He invites you to trust in Him for your salvation!

Today, He invites you to experience a foretaste of His eternal banquet in heaven as you come to His Table. For Jesus is the heavenly Bridegroom, and you – *the Church* – is His Bride. Today and each Divine Service is but a rehearsal for the never-ending feast of heaven! So, come to the wedding feast! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**