

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
3 October, Anno Domini 2021  
St. Matthew 22:1-14  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It's hard to miss the numerous invitations and warnings Jesus issues through this parable. Through His holy prophets - Adam, Noah, David, Isaiah, and countless others - God promised of old that He would save us from the hand of our enemies. He promised to send the Seed of the woman to crush the head of Satan and free us from sin, death, and eternal damnation. There, in the third chapter of Genesis, the King issued the first invitation to the wedding feast. All mankind, every descendant that would issue forth from Adam and Eve, was invited to receive the forgiveness of their sins, to have a seat at God's banquet feast of salvation. No one was excluded from the invitation - not Adam or Eve; not Cain; not those who perished in the Flood; not the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, or the Romans; not Judas; not the Muslim or the animism tribes of Papua New Guinea; not you. Through Adam, through Seth, through Noah, through David, through Jeremiah and through countless others the King has been issuing His invitation to salvation.

The problem is that not everyone wants a Messiah, not everyone wants salvation. The world, even though it is drowning in sin and death, is perfectly content to drown. Like those first invited, the world isn't interested. They have their own righteousness. Therefore, the invitation isn't only refused, it is despised, hated, and persecuted. It is offensive. The King didn't invite them to a potluck. He didn't ask them to bring a dish to share. They had nothing they could bring. The preparations had ALL been made by the only one who could make them - the blessed and holy Trinity. He had killed the fatted calf and everything was ready. Our salvation is never, has never been, a cooperation between God and man. It can't be. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we hate God, we hate mercy, we hate salvation. Unbelief spurns the invitation. It isn't content with just quietly not attending because of its insane hatred of God and His Christ. Not just the feast but even the invitation has to be silenced because there is nothing more offensive than being told you are a wicked and condemned sinner. The messengers must be silenced so that the message will be silenced and the host silenced.

What's strange about this king is that even after being so wickedly insulted, He sends out more messengers. He still wants those who reject Him to be guests at His table, feasting on His gifts. It doesn't matter how arrogantly they have despised them, He still wants them. Why? Why doesn't the king just write off the ingrates and move on? Because God loves sinners - all of them. God takes absolutely zero pleasure in the destruction of even the most vile person you can imagine. Why would He? Why would He desire to see the crown and most beloved part of creation suffer eternal judgment? The depth of His mercy is unfathomable to our feeble minds. We would have given up long ago. But if God were like us then we would likewise perish because we are as vile as the next. The ones who were invited last were certainly no more worthy of the invitation than the first. Everyone alike needs what God offers in Christ. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but God wants to save us all.

However, even though God's mercy endures forever, the invitation to that mercy doesn't. God's wrath and judgment are very real just as real as our sin and our unbelief. We need to take very seriously the warning that our Lord gives. Those who outright refused the invitation fell under God's wrath and were utterly destroyed. They despised the salvation prepared for them in Christ and so they met the King on the terms that they themselves had set. They issued an invitation to Him to destroy them. They declared war against the One who desired to save them. They didn't just reject an invitation. They rejected the one who sent the invitation. They rejected the gracious King and His kingdom of mercy and forgiveness. They had other commitments, other allegiances that kept them from the feast. They chose themselves and the world over the King and their salvation. Because they refused the righteousness of Christ, because they believed that their own righteousness was sufficient, because this world was too important to them, then all that remained for them was for the King to deal with them as their righteousness deserved, eternal destruction.

But they weren't the only ones who weren't allowed to enjoy the blessings of Jesus' righteousness. There is still another who is cast into the fires of hell. This one, rather than immediately rejecting the invitation, receives the invitation but tries to get in another way. Though outwardly he was found among the guests, he lacked something - the proper attire, true faith. Certainly, as he walked in the door, he was offered this garment. Again,

everything was ready, including the necessary garments for all the guests. But this man refused the garment. He too, thought he didn't need it. He sought to participate in salvation on his own terms. And it looked like he was going to get away with it. Maybe no one around him noticed but the King most certainly did.

Make no mistake about it, God wants you at His feast but that doesn't mean that He accepts you just the way you are, on your terms. Put that thought out of your mind because it is demonic. The garment you come wearing is covered in the filth of your jealousy, your self-righteousness, your covetous heart, your doubt, your worry, your arrogant pride, and your love of the world and its pleasures. God certainly doesn't accept your sins or your outward show of interest in Christianity. On the basis of what you're wearing (and of course I'm not talking about physical clothing), you shouldn't even be allowed in the door, let alone granted a seat at the table.

But that is the Gospel! God has provided exactly what you need - the robe of Christ's own righteousness that covers your sin. He takes your filthy garment and gives you His instead. It doesn't matter how dirty yours is because it is taken away from you so that you can wear what the King has prepared by slaughtering His Son for you. He makes you what you need to be and gives you what you need to have.

That is exactly what the invitation is. You are invited to be made new, to be made pure and spotless and holy. You are invited to lay aside your unrighteousness, to repent, and to be clothed with Christ in Holy Baptism. You are invited to the kingdom of God where sinners are made saints. You are invited to despise the foolishness of your own flesh and this present evil age. You are invited to set aside the sin that so easily entangles, the deceitful cares and pleasures of this world. You are invited to the life of forgiveness. You are invited to the freedom of living according to God's good and perfect will, of rejoicing in His Commandments, and walking according to His Word. And God fervently desires that YOU be at His table, in His kingdom, receiving His gifts of forgiveness life and salvation through Baptism, the Holy Communion, the Holy Absolution, and His Holy Word.

But take heed, lest you fall. You haven't been invited to persist in your sin under the guise of Christianity. Do not be deceived. The invitation to the kingdom of God is an invitation OUT of the slavery and perversity of this

world. The King sees past outward appearances straight to the heart and if your heart rests on returning to your farm and your business, if you cast aside the life of Christ for the death of sin and worldly pleasure, if you despise the Word and the precious feast of Christ's Body and Blood for worldly things, then you too on the Last Day, will be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness not because God so willed it, but because you did.

Dear children, heed the precious invitation of Your Savior and Your King who has prepared for you the rich feast of eternal salvation for you, who desires that you sit at His table and enjoy the boundless peace and comfort of His death and resurrection for you. Everything is ready. Your salvation in Jesus is complete. Come to the wedding feast.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(Please stand.) The peace of God, which passes all human understanding, keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.