

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
9 October, Anno Domini 2022  
St. Matthew 22:1-14

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

Dear saints of God,

We might be a bit surprised by the king's reaction to those who refused his gracious invitation. But this isn't a parable about manners. This is parable about salvation. It is an insistent warning issued to all who hear the gracious promises of God Almighty and spurn them. God the Father has prepared nothing less than eternal salvation for all sinners and desires that they receive it, that they believe that He has freely forgiven their sins by the atoning Blood of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, that they be robed in the wedding garments of salvation and so dressed sit at the Communion table that He might feed them with life.

The Gospel has been preached without ceasing since God first spoke it to Satan in Adam and Eve's hearing in the garden. Fathers, prophets, and priests were all commanded to proclaim the full Word of God calling sinners to repentance and pointing forward to the Messiah and the eternal wedding banquet of God's kingdom. Then, the Lord Himself came in the flesh as the fulfillment of their preaching, continuing the invitation. He commanded His apostles, pastors, and fathers to continue the faithful proclamation, inviting all to the feast of faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And so the invitation continues down to this day, today.

The Lord bids you to come, to lay aside all pride, all doubt, all reason; to stop chasing after vain and useless things like happiness or success. These are worthless and cannot help you either here or in eternity. They can be snatched away in a moment. Hurricane Ian has been a fresh reminder of that reality. It wasn't swayed by income level, political party, or skin color. It's destruction was equally applied. There is nothing in this life that can bring peace because everything and everyone is transient, temporary, and subject to death and decay just like you. Good paying jobs and life times of savings can be lost in the blink of an eye. Athletic prowess and health can be lost in the split second of an injury. Barns full of stuff can be swept away by the raging waters of a hurricane or flames of fire. You can labor and strain and try all day long and all of it will still amount to nothing. All of these things are fig leaves that man gathers to try to distract

from his sin. Nothing you do or have can put you in a better position before God. The only exception is Jesus Christ and His sure word which takes away sins. The works of Christ - suffering God's judgment, enduring death, pouring out His life as a sacrifice for the world - these alone endure. These alone can bring rest to wearied consciences and joy to the despairing.

It is central to this parable that the invitation is to a wedding feast. There has been a marriage, a union. It is the union of the divine with sinful man. It is the marriage, par excellence - the sinless Son of God with us, with the Church, with the Christian. This is no contractual agreement. This is God giving Himself - His life, His kingdom, all the treasures of heaven - to poor, miserable sinners who deserve nothing and have only our sin, our death, our sorrow, our filthiness to offer. But that is precisely what Jesus wants, because He wants to take it away from us. He wants to give us His life, forgiveness, holiness, joy, peace, and righteousness. He wants nothing from you. His desire is for you. Even if you had something, Jesus wouldn't care anything for it. It is you He wants because He wants to save you and bless you.

And this is what the Jews despised. They didn't desire their Lord. They desired their things - their works, their power, their glory. They wanted their Lord to give them things, just not Himself. But the Jews aren't unique in this. We all are tempted to despise this immeasurable gift, to chase after the blessings which God gives but care nothing for God Himself. We want the gifts but not the Giver. That isn't faith. That is unbelief and those wicked servants who heard the invitation and yet cared only for their farm, their business, their works were destroyed. They showed their hatred for God by their hatred of the servants whom He sent. They treated them shamefully, despising their preaching, letting and even causing them to languish and suffer, driving them away and even killing some - prophets, apostles, pastors, any who dare to speak God's Word against their sin and their rebellion and to show them the way to eternal life in Christ.

Do not be fooled. God now endures unbelief, continuing to send out the invitation that all might turn from their wickedness and live. He offers the wedding garment of Christ that all might be clothed in the righteousness of Christ and saved from eternal death. But His patience won't endure forever. The King will come and He will expose the hearts of men to the bright light of truth. The day will come when all those who despise the invitation will receive that which they have worked so hard to earn - the eternal punishment of their sin because they despised God's forgiveness. And as the man who snuck in without the wedding garment of faith, who actually refused the garment which was offered, those who attempt to hide by

simply being in the outward assembly of the Christian Church but who refuse the Gospel, who continue unrepentantly in their sin, and whose hearts still do not rest alone in Christ, these will be discovered when the King comes on the Last Day. We cannot judge the heart, only the outward confession. We believe what a person confesses with his lips unless he denies that confession either with his lips or his unrepentance. God, however, sees what the heart believes. He is not fooled by mere lip service and outward piety. Only those whose heart trusts in nothing but Christ, who repent of their weakness of faith and believe that Christ has borne all their iniquities on the cross and that for His sake only they will be received into eternal life, these alone will enjoy the wedding feast of Christ which has no end.

Indeed many, all, are called. Each of you this very hour are called to faith in Christ, to forsake the wickedness of the world, to lay aside your vanity and trust in reason and the things of the world. The wedding garment of Christ's righteousness is freely offered to you. None are refused except those who would come by a different way, who would confess a different salvation, who believe that their thoughts are higher than God's thoughts and their ways higher than His. The Gospel goes forth the ends of the earth that all might receive the invitation. Come, eat. Come, drink. The feast of salvation has been prepared. Bring nothing except your sin that Christ may take it from you. He desires you this day that He may lavish Himself and His kingdom with all of its blessings upon you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.