

Invited and Inviting

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

October 22, 2023

Matthew 22:1–14

Jesus tells a parable in the Gospel reading today of a king who holds a wedding banquet for his son. The servants go out to remind everyone who was invited, but they ignore the servants. The king really wants them to come celebrate. He sends out more servants. But they are ignored again. Some go back to work but then others seize the servants and mistreat them, even killing them. What's up with that? The king is enraged and sends out soldiers this time. They kill those people and burn down their cities. This is quite some story! But the king wants to have a celebration and he's going to have a celebration! He tells his servants this time to go beyond the city and invite all kinds of people, both evil and good. At last the day comes and the banquet is full and everyone is enjoying the glory of the king and the wedding of his son. But when the king is wandering around asking everyone how they're doing he comes across this one guy who is not dressed in wedding clothes. "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man is speechless and the king once again acts in anger, having the man thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus wraps it all up by saying that many are called but few are chosen, an often misunderstood statement.

Jesus' parable is at once a beautiful and glorious picture of God's Kingdom and His invitation and also a startling description of His response to those who refuse the invitation. Jesus tells why He is giving us this parable: this is how the Kingdom of God is. The king is God. His Son, of course, is His Son, the very Son of God. The wedding feast is the eternal wedding feast spoken of in both the Old Testament and in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

The parable gives the history of God's people. In the Old Testament God continued to invite His people to celebrate with Him and they time and time again refused Him and turned from Him. He would send prophet after prophet to urge them to not go their own way but to enjoy all the blessings God wanted to give them. The prophets are the servants and the Israelites are the people who were invited. Some simply went their own way, some actually tortured and murdered the prophets. God does not leave sin unpunished. The ultimate consequence of rejection of God is eternal torment in hell.

God chose a specific people through Abraham to be His chosen people. But that doesn't mean that God intended to save only them. All through the Old Testament Scriptures we see God's clarion call that goes out to the nations, the Gentiles, those who were not among the Israelites. They needed to reject their pagan religions and to be circumcised, but salvation indeed was for all people. We see this spelled out when the king says to the servants that those who were invited were not worthy—Go out and bring in all you can find. Notice how it's not just the good people. It says the evil and the good. No one is saved through genealogy. We are not saved through good works. You are not saved because you belong to the right church or are a part of the right group of people. You are saved by grace. You are saved because God saves you. Christ died for sinners.

Now the picture turns to the wedding celebration itself. Everyone is enjoying the lavish feast. But what are we to make of that one guy who apparently crashed the wedding? He's not wearing a wedding garment. What does it mean to have a wedding garment? Clearly the man needed one, he was thrown out because he didn't have one. And he wasn't just sent packing, he was cast out into outer darkness and torment.

What is the wedding garment? Theologians have proposed various interpretations, that it is Christ Himself, or repentance, or good works. It could very well be any of these. The one I'm drawn to is Baptism. How does one enter the Kingdom of God? In John 3 Jesus says it is through being born of water and the Spirit, what Paul speaks of in Titus 3 as the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. God has given us Baptism as the means through which we enter His Kingdom. Jesus has told us that this parable is about the Kingdom of God. In Baptism we become royalty, we are now sons and daughters of the King. In the Old Testament the way you entered the Kingdom of God was through circumcision. This was not a call to people to turn their lives around, to do something worthy of God's acceptance, to make a decision for God. Circumcision was done on the eighth day of the person's life. This was all God's work in bringing people into His eternal Kingdom.

So with Baptism. We are brought into God's eternal Kingdom through this holy sacrament of Baptism. There are many ways the New Testament describes what Baptism is and what it does. One of them is that in Baptism we are clothed with Christ. We are robed in the pure righteousness of the Son of God Himself. This seems a perfect fit for the imagery Jesus is using in His parable. The wedding garment is Baptism. We celebrate the eternal feast because we are baptized.

That's the parable. But there is also Jesus' assessment of it: For many are called, but few are chosen. People often are perplexed by this. What does Jesus mean by it? Many are called. Jesus describes this in His parable, the invitation goes out far and wide. God wants all people to be saved, He wants them celebrating His eternal feast with Him! But it ends up to be that only a few are chosen. What this does *not* mean is that God only chooses a few to be saved. Jesus makes this clear in His parable, God has all along made known to all people that He loves them and wants to bless them.

We see this in God's Son. Jesus is the only way to salvation. He did not suffer for the sins of only some people. God the Father did not tell His Son to atone only for the sins of those He chose in the first place. The Bible is crystal clear that God desires that all people be saved, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2. He says in 2 Corinthians 5 that "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." When Jesus says that only a few are chosen it does not mean that God chooses everyone else to go to hell. This is also made clear by the fact that those who suffered the wrath of God suffered it because they rejected Him. God had gone out of His way to invite them and to implore them to join in on the celebration.

And this is the ultimate beauty of this parable of our Lord. We are all sinful. But we sinful human beings are the ones God has invited into His eternal glory and celebration. Not everyone

knows. Not everyone believes. Since you and I know and believe and are already enjoying the manifold blessings of God, let's get in on the inviting. Let's tell people. Let's share with them the good news that God has invited them also to the eternal banquet. Amen.

SDG

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