

Matthew 22:1-14

Pentecost 19 + Proper 23A + October 11, 2020
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Called and Chosen

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Many are called, but few are chosen.

Who gets called to the wedding banquet in the parable? Many. Everybody, in fact. The king first sends out the invitations to – well, to “his people,” telling them to save the date. He’s prepared the wedding feast for his son: the food is practically on the table. This is the wedding of the prince: who would refuse? So the king sends out his servants to tell his invited guests that the time has come: “Everything is ready!” he declares. “Come to the wedding feast!”

Nobody comes. It’s not that they’ve forgotten or they’re in a bind. Some decide that they have better things to do...like another day at the farm or the office. Others aren’t guilty of bad prioritizing: they’re openly hostile. They seize the king’s servants and kill them. This is no small insult: if you spit in the face of the king’s servant, you spit in the face of the king. Kill his servant, and you reject the king. It’s no surprise that the king is angry.

It’s a bad start, but the king will have a wedding feast for his son; so he calls more. He tells 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.” Now that the expected guests have refused, the king invites everyone. He tells his servants not to be choosy, and they’re not: they gather all whom they find, both bad and good. Soon the wedding hall is filled with guests...all sorts of guests! They’re not the sort that you’d normally find in the king’s court: they’re rough, rude, smelly and coarse. They are not there because they’ve earned it. They’re there because the king has invited them.

Many are called. Everybody’s been called now. The king hasn’t been choosy at all.

Then the king appears – the guests are gathered and it’s time for the wedding feast. But there’s one more hitch. The king spots one man who isn’t wearing a wedding garment. He asks the man how he got in, and the man is speechless. The king acts decisively: he commands his attendants to throw him outside – into outer darkness, no less, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Some are probably bothered by this turn of events: the king seems to have a short, violent temper. He wasn’t choosy about the guests, but now he’s choosy about what they wear? You, of course, know better than to doubt the king. This is like one of those fancy restaurants that require a coat and tie; and if you show up for your reservation without a coat, they’ve got some in the closet for you to wear. So it is with a 1st-century wedding banquet: wedding attire is required, but the banquet host provides for those in need. If this guy isn’t wearing the right clothes, it’s not that he’s poor. Rather, he’s rebellious. He wants to be in the king’s house on his own terms, rejecting the robe that the king offers. He’s not thrown out for being poorly-dressed. He’s tossed because, like the first guest list, he denies the will and the generosity of the king.

Now that he’s gone, let the wedding feast begin. Let me add one more detail that isn’t in the text: this isn’t a three-hour dinner or even the standard week-long 1st-century shindig. This wedding feast never ends. When you were gathered into the wedding hall, you left your old life behind and you’re not going back. Unless you elect to leave the king, his clothes and his feast, you’ve got a new life forever.

Many are called in the parable – in fact, all are called and that’s a great many. Few are chosen in the parable, but those who believe the king and remain are those who are chosen.

+++

It’s an odd story. What sort of nobles would prefer another day of dusty sweat to a party with the king? What sort of king would respond by destroying their city? And after being so concerned about the guest list at first, why would he then invite literally *anyone*?

It’s an odd story because it points to Jesus. He is the king’s son in the parable, and the wedding feast is the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven. From the beginning and throughout history, it’s been the Father’s plan to deliver His people out of the highways and hedges of this dying world and into eternal life with Him. He has sent His prophets to announce that the wedding feast is coming; and now, throughout His public ministry, Jesus proclaims, “Come to My eternal wedding celebration – by My work and Word, I make you an honored guest!”

And who should rejoice most of all? Why, the chief priests and the Pharisees, along with the rest of Israel. They are, after all, God’s people since the time of Abraham. They’ve had the constant witness of His Word and presence for centuries. They know the Scriptures about the Messiah. No one should be more ready for the wedding feast of heaven than they who have been waiting for the Messiah for so long.

And what is the response? Many simply have better things to do. Because they’re in love with the world, they really can’t be bothered with Jesus’ call to repentance and eternal life. Others aren’t busy, but hostile: as the Son of God stands in their midst and invites them to the eternal banquet, they’re plotting to seize Him, treat Him shamefully and kill Him. In fact, where Jesus is already the son and the messenger, He has another role in the parable: He’s the sacrificial meal, the Lamb about to be slaughtered so that the wedding feast can take place.

Jesus’ own do not receive Him; and as a consequence, their city will be destroyed about forty years later. However, the Lord doesn’t give up. He invites all: He gathers in prostitutes, tax collectors, soldiers and all nations. You! Me! There is no one whom He would not call into His kingdom. He invites all with the message, “In Me, all is prepared and eternal life is yours!” The preparations are completed on Calvary a couple days later, when the dying bridegroom utters, “It is finished.” He suffers and dies for the sins of all. And because He dies for the sins of all, He can clothe them with grace. He can clothe them in the robe of His righteousness so that they’re ready for the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The one man without the wedding garment is a pretty evident warning. You’ll meet your share of people who say, “I’m going to heaven because I’m good enough.” If they believe this, then they’re trying to get in wearing their own righteousness. But their own righteousness is filthy rags or a polluted garment (Isaiah 64:6). That’s not a proper outfit for a wedding feast that lasts forever – it’s the sort of “look-at-me” conceit that gets one thrown out. Oh, you want to be clothed in Christ and His righteousness.

You already have been. It happened at your baptism, for Galatians 3:27 declares that all who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Already at your baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ declared, “The wedding feast of the Lamb for eternity in heaven is coming, and you’re invited.” What to wear? Jesus goes on, “This day, by water and the Word, I’ve clothed you with Me, wrapped you in My righteousness. Wear this, and you’re among the chosen.”

In Holy Baptism, then, the Lord has already clothed you for the feast. In fact, since you’re already dressed, the Christian life is really about keeping the right clothes on. The devil’s always putting on his own fashion show. He wants you to change out of Christ and His righteousness. He wants you to

trust in your own works and proudly wear your own sins instead – Satan wants you to show up at heaven’s gate like the man without the garment in the parable, saying to Jesus, “I dress myself. I’m fit for heaven without You.” Or he just wants you to shrug off the robe and move on to a life of willful sin, doing whatever you want to do. It may feel free for now, but on Judgment Day you’ll be naked and ashamed.

It’s the Word and the Supper that keep that robe in good shape. They grant the forgiveness, taking away those sins that would soil and wear away the robe of Christ until you leave it behind. That’s why you keep coming to church, right? Every sermon, reading and hymn is a renewal of God’s invitation, “Come to the wedding feast for the sake of My Son, who died and rose for you.” Every Supper is a foretaste of the marriage feast to come, a feast of victory for our God; for in that Holy Communion, no less than Jesus visits – body, blood and all – to forgive your sins, and to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith unto the marriage feast everlasting.

Be careful. As Jesus warns in the parable, it’s far too easy in this life to dismiss the King’s invitation, to pay no attention and go off to the farm, the business, the football game, the ski slope, the warm bed, or whatever else. Persist in that, and you’ll shrug off Christ and His righteousness. You might even become hostile to the message and the messenger.

Folks, don’t underestimate what happens here. The Bible doesn’t just say you’re honored guests at the wedding feast of heaven; together, you’re the Church, and the Church is the bride of Christ. The engagement – the betrothal – has taken place between Christ and His bride, sealed by His blood; the wait will end, and the everlasting wedding day will come. In the meantime, Christ comes to visit you here. To hear the Word of God is to hear the present Christ speak to you, His bride *for whom He has died*. To receive His Supper is to receive the Bridegroom Himself for the forgiveness of sins here. By His Word and Supper, Jesus Himself visits and says, “I’ve called you and chosen you. I’ve clothed you in righteousness so that you’re gowned for the celebration. Remain in My righteousness – be My girl. Be patient. The wait will end. The wedding day will come.”

For the sake of Jesus, the wedding feast of heaven is coming. And by His grace, you’re ready for whenever it arrives. Clothed in His righteousness, the Lord sees your sins no more. Ponder that! When the Lord looks upon you, He sees only His bride who is clothed in brilliant white, cleansed and spotless, without any stain or blemish at all. Why? Because you are His. You are called, and you are chosen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen