

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, A²D 2010

Matthew 22:1-14

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

1 God does not love you just the way you are. He is not like Billy Joel or Fred Rogers or Bruno Mars or a doting grandfather; He simply does not like you the way you are. Nor should you. The way you are apart from God is a rebel against Him. Sinners cannot abide in His presence, so He cannot leave you as you are. Even as a Christian, as the Apostle Paul describes, in this life, there is a constant struggle between your old sinful flesh and the new life delivered to you in Holy Baptism. God doesn't love that old sinner, which is why He drowned him in Baptism in the first place. He is constantly recreating you, renewing you in that baptismal grace. If He loved you just the way you are, He would not have to intervene to change you, to forgive you.

2 There's no mistaking the fact that God wants everyone to be saved and that the call to His banquet is for everyone. When those invited rejected the invitation, the Master of the Banquet sent His messengers to the highways and the crossroads to summon anyone they could find. He sends servants to invite anyone and everyone until the banquet hall is filled. God is no respecter of persons. He invites everyone: rich and poor, good and bad, brilliant and dull. And the banquet hall will be filled. All of God's elect will be there. Many are called; in fact, all are called. But few are chosen. God makes very clear the means through which He does His election, His choosing: Word and Sacrament. You may not spend a lifetime rejecting the means through which God does His electing and yet suppose yourself to be among the elect. To reject God's gifts is to reject His call. He does not create people to damn them as some strange display of His sovereignty, as the Calvinists believe. And neither is He unable to save you except that you ask Him to, as the Evangelicals believe. God loves all and desires all to be saved, but He cannot and does not love them as they are.

3 Apparently not everyone who comes to the wedding banquet will be permitted to stay. Not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. Not everyone who goes to church is a Christian, one of God's elect. On one hand, Jesus' warning in the parable is crystal clear to those who would stay away from the wedding banquet of Christ and His Bride the Church, of which He gives you a foretaste every Sunday in His Supper, preferring instead to go after worldly pursuits: one to his farm, another to his business. When the Gospel call to come to the banquet is ignored, when those invited reject the invitation and persecute or kill the messengers, God is justly enraged. On the other hand, just being where God gives out His gifts is not enough; the Sacraments do not save you by themselves, as the Romanists suppose. God's Sacraments always work, but you only receive the benefit of them by faith. Faith is required.

4 The man without a wedding garment is an insult to the Master of the Banquet, whose invitation included the required attire. He is not welcome to come wearing whatever he thinks is right.

The assumption that what you wear doesn't matter as long as you're wearing something is as old as it is false. After they rebelled against God, Adam and Eve's eyes suddenly turned toward themselves. And they saw that they were naked. They had been naked all along, but they hadn't cared until they sinned. Suddenly, sinners care about themselves. The nature of sin is to be curved in on yourself. So seeing themselves and being ashamed, Adam and Eve sought to make clothes for themselves. What they wore didn't matter they supposed, as long as they wore something. So fig leaves sewn into garments were their clothing of choice. But they weren't good enough. Leaves cannot cover sin and shame. So God made different clothes for them, clothes more to His liking, from the skin of an animal. And animals don't give up their skins without also shedding their blood and losing their lives. The message is clear: sin means death. To cover sin, something has to die.

5 There can be no nonchalance. God does not love you as you are; neither may you. You may not prefer to remain in your sins, your rebellion against Him. To do so is to misunderstand His love for you completely. His love for you is tremendous, immeasurable, bigger than your brain can comprehend. It's that love that sent His Son to be named Jesus, the One who saves you from your sins. God loves you so much that He refuses to leave you as you are. But He sent Jesus to take away your sins, to remove your corruption. And He loves you enough to let His Son die in your place. He loves you tremendously: not as you are, but as He desires you to be. God does not love you as you are. He only loves you in Jesus.

6 God is not in the reformation business, but the resurrection business. You don't need some minor improvements. You need death and resurrection. You need Baptism. God has no desire to leave you as you are. He has given you new life. In Baptism, He has covered you—clothed you with the proper attire, the wedding garment—with Jesus. To cover sin, someone had to die. He feeds you with Jesus. And He will raise you with Jesus. You will not remain as you are, in this state, struggling against sin and corruption. If you are uncomfortable now, wishing to be done with this struggle against your sinful flesh, you will be relieved on that Day. If you are dissatisfied with your life now, with your half-hearted righteous works, with your constant stumbling back into sin, you will be satisfied when Jesus returns. He will not leave you as you are. He has changed you, recreated you in Holy Baptism; He recreates you and renews you in His Supper. That change will be perfect and complete, no longer hidden in this shadow, when the eternal Banquet arrives.

7 If God's love for you were to love you just the way you are, it would be shallow love. But His love for you is deep enough to have sent His Son to redeem you from sin and death. His love for you is deep enough to clothe you as He requires, to leave no detail to chance, to mask you with the righteousness of Jesus, and to remove every stain of sin. You need not remain as you were, improperly dressed for the banquet. He has delivered faith to you. He forgives you in Holy Absolution, and He changes you from the outside in by feeding you with the Body and Blood of Jesus. God loves you perfectly. That is, His love for you is perfect, and His love makes you perfect. He loves you in Jesus. He has clothed you in Jesus; He feeds you in Jesus; and He is transforming you into the likeness of Jesus.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer