

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, A✠D, 2008

Matthew 22:1-14 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

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

1 The kingdom of heaven is like a King who hosted a wedding banquet for His Son, Jesus said. First the King sent out His servants to call those invited to the banquet. To the people of Israel, the Lord sent prophet after prophet. Some they ignored; some they persecuted. But the King persisted. He would not host an empty banquet. So He sent more servants, more and more prophets to call the children of Israel to repentance, to return to the Lord. Finally, He sent John the Baptist. But they paid no attention and went off, some to a business, some to recreation. Those who didn't go off to their own pursuits stayed, but they put the prophet of the Lord to death. And the King responded in kind; using the Roman army as His instrument, He destroyed Jerusalem, burning it to the ground and destroying the temple in 70 A.D.

2 The warning is strong, but it's not for you. It's a warning to those who altogether reject the Lord's gracious invitation to come to the wedding banquet of His Son and go off to the farm, to the business, to recreation, to false invitations and false kings, to other pursuits. God is not mocked; what one reaps, that will he sow. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap destruction (Gal 6:7-8). Rejecting the Lord's gracious invitation has terrible, eternal consequences. But that warning is not for you. You're here. No, the parable goes on to give you a warning.

3 The servants were sent back out. The apostles and those in the office of the apostolic ministry still go out. They call with God's gracious invitation to anyone and everyone. The King adamantly wants His banquet hall filled. God desires that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Ti 2:4). They go to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as are found, both good and bad.

4 You have heard the Lord's call and have come here, to the place where you get a foretaste of the great wedding banquet to come. You have been given the proper attire. You may not come wearing whatever you desire. You may only come wearing the wedding garment, the attire purchased for you by the King Himself, the very righteousness of Jesus, delivered to you in Holy Baptism. So here's the warning. Not everyone who comes expecting to join the wedding feast will be allowed to stay. The King will find the impostor—quite easily in fact—because the impostor will not be wearing a wedding garment. He looks not for church membership but for the wedding garment.

5 What will he be wearing instead? Death. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord described the feast: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever" (Is 25:6-9). Death was the covering cast over you, the veil you wore, the consequence of your sin, until the Lord intervened. So why go back to your old clothing? Why give yourself back to death?

6 The one wearing death, the one going back to his old sinful ways, is cast out of the King's presence. "By coming without proper dress you dishonor and spite [the King]! These are the kind of people you will find in the church. They listen to the preaching, are baptized, partake of the Sacrament, and yet do not wear wedding garments; that is, they do not believe, do not demonstrate any serious intent, make believe they are Christian, and use the name Christian" (Luther, *Second House Postil*). To give up the garment of repentance and forgiveness of sins the Lord has clothed you with in Holy Baptism is an affront to the King's mercy. It's an insult to Him to suppose that you need not struggle against your sin of anger, bitterness, pride, selfishness, lust, and any other indulgence of the flesh. Repent of your illusion, lest you be cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord that He may have compassion on him" (Is 55:7).

7 Do not naively suppose you may wear whatever you wish. Do not dangerously hope that God will take you into the banquet hall just as you are. No, He has chosen your attire. And what's more, He has purchased for you the required garment. This pricey, otherwise unobtainable piece of fashion is the holiness God requires of you. And since you were unable to obtain it on your own, since even your best righteous deeds were only filthy rags (Is. 64:6), God purchased it for you. God the Son took the clothes of human flesh and was born in

the Virgin's womb. And when all other clothing was stripped from Him, when He hung naked on the cross, dying, He wore only your sinfulness. His death has undone death. His blood is what makes white and holy the garment He wishes you to wear to His wedding banquet. It doesn't matter your past sins or your past pretending. The garment of the righteousness of Jesus, delivered to you in Holy Baptism, still belongs to you by the death of Jesus. He wore your sins so that you might wear His righteousness.

8 He who died, Jesus Christ, is He who rose. He, the Crucified, is also the Bridegroom. And this, the Divine Service, is the beginning of the wedding banquet. His invitation is for you. You who so desperately need forgiveness from the Lord, who wear the robe of daily repentance and sorrow for your sin, are welcomed at His table. But when you arrive, you discover something strange. You are both the guest at the wedding feast and the bride. You are the Lord's beloved. And here, the Lord is both Groom and feast, giving you Himself, as any faithful husband does. He gives you His very Body which was crucified for you. And He gives you His very Blood which was shed to forgive your sins. Come, everyone who has no money, no righteousness, come buy and eat, without money and without price (Is 55:1). This is a taste of the eternal wedding banquet for which we wait.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
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