

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
10/13/2013  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
Matthew 22:1-14  
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Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

A number of times Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables concerning the kingdom of God. These parables are pictures of how the Kingdom of God is. They are singular pointed stories that reveal something about the Kingdom of God and our part in it. The parable before us today might be one of the least vague of Jesus' parables. And yet those who needed to receive and hear the Word of God in this parable still didn't get it. In fact the next verse following this parable indicates the Pharisees plotted after hearing it how to entrap Jesus in His words.

Jesus gives the Pharisees His Word and instead of receiving the faith it creates they hardened their heart against the faith all the more. "*Hearing they did not hear.*" Let it not be so among us today.

*"And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come."* If you've been a Christian for any length of time at all you know that we're all waiting to be taken up to a great feast in heaven which is the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. John in the last book of the

Scriptures writes “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

The marriage feast of the Lamb is the culmination of all of history. It is when Christ takes His Bride, the Church. She is a bride who is made perfect and pure by the merits, the works of Jesus Christ. It’s His life, death and resurrection, ascension and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming that made her perfect and pure. The Bride of Christ, the Church, is made up of all believers of Christ from all times and places. Today you and I belong to the Church Militant. We’re down here in this sinful world fighting with and for the faith of Christ in this time and place by the power of the Holy Spirit. But our goal is that we’ll one day be with the Church triumphant in heaven singing praises with all the company of heaven. We will take our place at the Lamb’s marriage feast as a member of the Bride of Christ, the Church.

So Jesus starts the parable by saying “*a king was giving a wedding feast for his son.*” Does that sound familiar? The parable is a direct reflection of the reality that is in heaven even now as Christ is readying His Bride for marriage. But note what the parable says: The king called those who were invited but they would not come. These are the people the king knew. These were not the strangers and foreigners. These were the people of his own realm and they would not hear. They were disinterested and busy with other things, important or not.

Now first of all Jesus is directing this parable to the descendants of Israel. He aimed this parable at those who followed the Pharisees’ distortion of God’s true religion. He originally aims the parable at those who no longer believe or

consider that salvation will come through the Messiah who will be born of the line of David. Salvation for these people was primarily a matter of adhering to the Law. It was earning salvation through one's own efforts and religion.

It'd be like we Lutherans thinking we're going to be saved because we're good practicing Lutherans, if that's even the case. Or it'd be like us thinking that we're pretty good people, "I'm a pretty good person who doesn't need much saving and therefore I only have a small need for a Savior". A pretty good person, one who's not as sinful as the next guy, can earn some of his own salvation. That's what's being said, right? Otherwise there's no reason to observe or say it.

Well that'd be true if the Word of God didn't say, "*The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*"

So the self righteous, whether Pharisees of old or ignorant relativists today, condemn themselves because their trust isn't in Christ. Christ is the King's Son who is sent to bring the world the Good News of reconciliation with God.

Notice how God's reconciliation works. In our world reconciliation works like this: The person who is wrong, the one who did the bad deed must go to the one wronged. He must go to the wronged person and make amends for what he has done. If his penance is enough, painful enough, then wronged person may

allow them kindness. But the evil deed will likely not be forgotten. That's the way human reconciliation works.

But God's reconciliation works like this: God sees we've sinned. God also sees we can't get ourselves out of our sin and its penalty. We're stuck. We're helpless. So God, the One who was wronged, goes about righting the wrong. It's He who suffers our penalty for our sin and it's He that provides for us a marriage feast when He takes the Church as His Bride.

And yet Israel killed the prophets who foretold the Savior and killed the Son He sent to save them. Many today, some even in the Church, do not believe they are saved solely by the grace of God and they persecute Christ by persecuting the one He has sent to deliver the Good News to them.

So the King throws open the doors. He doesn't cancel the feast because His friends turned out to be enemies. No! The celebration must go on. The Son must be married. The Bride is readied. All is in place. All that is needed is to fill the banquet hall with people, those who will sit at the feast with the Groom and Bride. And so the Word goes out again.

*“Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. And 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.”*

Israel wouldn't hear the Word so God gave it to others. He gave it to the Gentiles those who were not of Israel and many of them heard and received faith and they became God's people. We're the Gentiles. We're those born from above to God. We're abnormally born. That doesn't matter. What matters is

that by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God He has made us His heirs. Absolutely without condition God called us in from the outside to dine at His table. We are the bad and good of this world. He's called us to be His people.

But we must be careful lest we too give up what the Son longs for us to have. We too can fall into rebellion and disinterest. We too can give up the faith by tending to the desires we have for the world rather than the gift of forgiveness and justification God gives us in Christ.

That last section of this reading says, *"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then 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.'* For many are called, but few are chosen."

Now you must understand it's impossible to get into heaven without being properly attired. This parable isn't saying that a mistake will be made and an unwelcome person will get in by mistake and then be put out. Rather the point here is that in order to inherit eternal life one must wear the correct attire. Of course the question then must be, "What is that and where might I get the correct garment.

Well, it isn't at Neiman Marcus. It's not at the Men's Warehouse and it's not even at Wal-Mart or Target. Revelation gives us a huge hint: Talking about the uncountable number of people before the throne of God the Elder says,

*“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Zechariah says, “Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” And Saint Paul says, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

So those in heaven clothed in white are clothed with Christ righteousness which is given through baptism, the water and the Word combined. Nothing else will do. Nothing else that you get or earn here will make the trip to heaven. Only what Christ has earned and given through His means will accompany the believers to eternity. Anyone else, anyone who has not been washed in the blood of the Lamb through baptism, will not be allowed entrance to heaven but rather will have to stay in the outer darkness forever. Outside apart from the Hope of God.

So let's celebrate. You're baptized. You're clothed in Christ's righteousness. You've heard the Word of God and have received the faith. And to top it all off, here, you're about to receive a small taste of the feast to come in the Lord's body and blood given, shed and distributed to you in this place. You have the invitation from the Father and you have the correct apparel from Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*