

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 22:1-14
October 29th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Come to the Wedding

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The servants are sent out into the streets to invite as many as they find, the good and the bad. No respect is paid to rank, class, or privilege. Everyone, apart from works or genealogy, gets the same invitation. In a world with no free lunches the offer of an endless banquet in paradise seems too good to be true. But it is true. All things have been paid for, all things necessary have been sacrificed. The meat, the milk, the wine, the best parts are on the table. It is prepared for you: no cost, no price. It is pure gift.

But many reject the invitation. Some, are actually hardcore rebels. They know the invitation is from the King, but they don't care. They hate the King. They want to be their own lords and in so doing they embrace Hell with enthusiasm. They treat the servants sent by the King spitefully and even kill them. They have no use for the Word of God. On the other hand, some, are indifferent to the King. They go about their business as if there was no invitation; no feast to attend. They are more concerned with their business and conduct in this life than attending the feast and paying homage to the King. But most, simply don't believe the invitation is valid, that it actually is from the King, or even that there is a King. They have lived in delusion for so long that it has become comfortable; it is the only thing they know. They are afraid of change, afraid to risk anything, afraid to come out of the darkness and be exposed. They don't want to be noticed. They want to hide, keep their blemishes secret and pretend they are better than they are. Despite their constant speaking of what they believe is wisdom, they don't have enough intellectual honesty to face the Word of God.

That is because the Word of God is a threat—to us all. For the Word of God wields spiritual and heavenly power. It changes things. It kills and it makes alive. It threatens to break our hearts and change our minds. What the rejecters of the Word of God have always thought is wrong. What is comfortable, what makes sense, what they know from experience and reason, is wrong. What they think about God—that He is the grandfatherly eternal gift-giver Who doesn't punish any wrong-doing—is wrong. What they think about man—that he has no need for God, because he is basically a good person—is wrong. What they expect from life—that they deserve only good things and all their works are righteous apart from faith—is all wrong. That the world thinks this way, and sometimes we also get trapped into thinking this way, is pretty scary. God beckons them to a position of weakness and vulnerability, of faith in things that they cannot see, of a life under the cross of Christ. But what they can see, a man hanging on a cross, His followers persecuted and martyred, poverty and hunger, and a list of commandments they do not want to keep, they do not like. So, like roaches, they scurry back to the darkness, back to

the cold embrace of the devil in ignorance. Sadly, they think they made the wise choice and from the world's perspective they did, for the world teaches us to seek only what is good for ourselves and those close to us; to avoid that which is scary. But the wisdom of men is folly and the foolishness of the cross is the only true Wisdom.

Thanks be to God, that a few are so desperate, so lonely, so tired, so hurt that they come despite the foolishness. They are the meek. But they inherit a Kingdom. They are brought into the wedding hall, clothed with the wedding garments, which are the righteousness of Christ, and embraced as long-lost children. All this is accomplished through Holy Baptism. The Holy Ghost creates faith in them through the waters of Holy Baptism and they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ through the faith created in them. The baptized are now home at last. We are now home at last in the wedding hall of the Church. The loneliness and heartbreak, the weariness and fear, the frustration and pain of our time in the kingdoms of men is removed. For we look forward to another Kingdom—a Kingdom in Heaven. We have a citizenship promised to us; a citizenship in which we now enjoy membership, and will enjoy for all eternity, on account of the righteousness of Christ—the wedding garments—that we wear through faith in the Christian Church.

Our Lord, the King, sent out His servants to invite us to come to the wedding by His Word, and we listened to that Word, and believed that Word, and we cling to that Word in faith. For it is our hope and salvation. He has invited us by His servants. We have been found and restored with new wedding garments. We have been forgiven and cleansed by Holy Baptism. We are now filled with joy.

But, my dear friends, do not be found without a wedding garment. Do not be found without the righteousness of Christ, which can only be obtained through the faith which the Holy Ghost creates in you through the means of grace. This is why we must never forsake our coming to this house of worship—we must always be ready to heed the King's invitation to come to the wedding and enjoy His feast. Therefore, come to the wedding feast whenever we gather for worship. Hear His Word and your soul shall live, for your doubts will be removed, you believe and cling to Him Who will give you life eternal. Be meek and humble. Let His Word have its way with you. Stop trying to harmonize the Word with your ideas and doctrines, apologizing for the stern, jealous God of Abraham and rest in the sure mercies of David. Let God speak for Himself. For His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. But His Word is Truth. It does not lie. It is not evil. It is good. It will accomplish that for which it was sent. Let it break your heart and change your mind. Let it expose you, make you weak and vulnerable. Be desperate for the joy found only in this wedding hall—this place of worship. Be lonely outside of this fellowship. Be tired enough, be weary enough, be hurt enough to give up your will and cling to the will of God. For then you will be strong. In defeat, you will find victory. In hunger, you will find satisfaction—you will find a meal which will sustain you for all eternity.

That is the way of the cross, the way our God endured to make us His. It is a way, but we have not yet arrived. We still have things to learn and things to suffer. The Word is still working on us, still breaking and changing us. We learn humility and faith in the exposure of our errors—our sin—and in His immeasurable grace He shows to us when we repent of our sin and wish to do better. The Word made Flesh covers us. We are clothed with His righteousness. We are clothed with the wedding garments He has clothed us with through faith. But, even as the Word of God breaks us, it also binds us together into one community—a community of believers who cling to the Word of God and all of its promises for us. The Word of God restores and refreshes us through faith.

The Father Himself loves you. He shows this by inviting you to the wedding feast. He loves you individually, specifically, personally. He shows this by going into the highways and byways to invite you into His Church. He sent the Prophets and Apostles, and even sent you His holy Minister to preach into your ears the invitation to enjoy this eternal feast in His Kingdom. But more than that, He has sent His Only-Begotten Son to fulfill the Word of God which we are unable to, and to suffer and die in your place.

And now He sends out His Holy Ghost to gather us into His wedding hall. His Spirit has been planted in you through water and Word. You have been clothed with Christ. He places you in His Temple—in His own righteousness. He feeds you with His real and substantial Body and Blood, which you did not earn and could not buy, in bread and wine. He abides in you through the wedding garment you wear; the faith that is wrapped around, which is a part of the righteousness of Christ. He speaks to you in the Holy Absolution and you are forgiven of the sins of which you confess and repent, and you are made holy and righteous, through the faith with which you are clothed—which believes the proclamation that your sins are indeed forgiven. Even now, He is guiding you home to the place where you belong through His Word—His eternal home in Heaven.

You are a citizen of His Kingdom by virtue of the invitation. It doesn't matter if you were good or bad according to the precepts of the world. You are His. He has bought you. He has clothed you with His righteousness through faith. He has even given you the faith to believe in Him through the means of grace. You are now a faithful guest in the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. That is what matters. What you are supplants what you were. You were outside in the highways and byways, on account of your sin and unbelief, but now you are in the Kingdom through the faith implanted in you.

But you are still in a foreign land. You are a sojourner and foreigner traveling home, eager to return for the King's wedding banquet. There is temptation along the way; temptation to doubt and fear. The many of this evil world beckon to you from their dark doorways, like the sirens of Ulysses, to destruction. Some have been seduced into depravity. They have shed the garment of righteousness and been cast back into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Be warned. Be watchful. Be vigilant in prayer. Forsake the ways of men. Hold fast to the ways of God. For God has placed way stations like this along the way for you, places of His presence, of His Word and Sacrament, of His regenerating love; places for you to be re-broken and rebound, to be recast and recovered, to be reconnected with the saints who have gone before you, and forgiven again. God is here for you. You are in the right place.

Finally, there is one more surprise of the King's grace for you. For when at last you arrive at the wedding hall you will find that you are not merely a guest, an honored niece or nephew, even a brother of the Bridegroom. You are the very Bride, the one for whom He did it all, the one He loves. The One Who sacrificed His very life for you and all those who believe on His Name. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.