

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 22:1-14
October 25th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

They Were Not Willing to Come

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father: We thank Thee, that of Thy great mercy Thou hast called us by Thy holy Word to the blessed Marriage-Feast of Thy Son, and through Him dost forgive us all our sins; but, being daily beset by temptation, offense, and danger, and being weak in ourselves and given to sin, we beseech Thee graciously to protect us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we fall not; and if we fall and defile our wedding-garment, with which Thy Son hath clothed us, graciously help us again and lead us to repentance, that we fall not forever; preserve in us a constant faith in Thy grace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

The prevailing thought in our society today is that if you are basically a “good person” you will go to Heaven. Our society also believes that those who do end up in Hell will basically be partying like a rock star with all the “cool people” who could not get into Heaven because of the way they lived their lives. The Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew shows that this is not what Hell is going to be like; it is not going to be a place of partying. The man in the parable without a wedding garment, we are told, was cast into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the picture of what Hell will be like. There will be no light. There will be weeping, that is, much sorrow. And, there will be gnashing of teeth. When holy Scripture talks about gnashing of teeth it refers to anger. That is why people bite their teeth in the holy Scriptures, they are filled with rage and hatred.

Therefore, Hell will not be a place of partying like a rock star with all the cool people, but it will be a place of eternal darkness, sorrow and anger. Sorrow because of the reality of their eternal fate. Anger both at the other people there with them, and at the God Who they rejected, and on account of this sentenced them to be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness. There will be eternal darkness, because those who lived spiritually blind lives here on Earth, will no longer have the many graces that are bestowed upon them by the Triune Lord God, Who loves mankind and gives sun and rain both to the evil and good. The Light of the Gospel—the Light that our Lord God gives and which emanates from Him—will be eternally removed from them, so that they sit in darkness forever.

This is the picture of Hell that the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew describes for us through the words of our Lord + Jesus’ parable of the Wedding Feast: Darkness, sorrow, and people filled with anger and rage at their eternal lot.

Therefore, my dear friends, how does one avoid such a fate? Or rather, how does one acquire such an eternal fate? That is shown us in the parable of the Wedding Feast that our Lord + Jesus tells today. There are two halves to this parable. The first half describes the people who were originally invited, and when the Wedding Feast was ready, refused to come. They did not have any use for the gifts of the King. Not only did they “make light of it” and just go about their lives and business as if there was no invitation, but some even were so crass as to mistreat and kill the servants that were sent to invite them to the Wedding Feast.

The graciousness of the King and how He desired to give good things to His subjects is shown by the description of the Feast. The bulls and fattened calves were slaughtered; there was plenty of food, and the best of foods was being offered. Furthermore, the word in our English translations rendered as “dinner” in the Greek actually referred to the first meal of the day—breakfast. In other words, this Feast was not an evening only kind of Feast, it was an all-day Feast. Spiritually this represents the eternal nature of the Feast. This Feast would last forever, and it would encompass all the best foods that life can offer. In other words, just as our Lord + Jesus supplies a description of Hell in His parable, He also supplies a description of what Heaven will be like. It will be an eternal banquet—an eternal Wedding Feast of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church.

Originally the Church was the Jews, the descendants of Abraham who were called away from their false gods to a land flowing with milk and honey, and land that the Lord God would give them so that they could worship Him in true and purity forever. It was into this people that the Lord + Jesus came down from Heaven and was incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the descendant of King David. He was born a Jew for the salvation of the Jews. He came that He might redeem His people Israel. But the Jews who He had invited through Abraham and the Patriarchs, and through Moses and all the Prophets, made light of this invitation, mistreated the Prophets, and killed the Only-Begotten Son of the heavenly Father on the tree of the holy cross. Indeed, this parable is spoken by our Lord in the week leading up to His crucifixion, as the Sadducees and Pharisees are silenced by the Lord + Jesus and dared ask Him no more questions in the verses following today’s Gospel pericope.

On account of this the heavenly Father sent out the Roman army in the year 70 A.D. to kill those who did not honor Him and His invitation and burn the city of those who were not worthy to the ground.

There were, however, many Jews who did believe on the Lord + Jesus, and received His invitation with joy. These included the Apostles and all those who became disciples of the Lord + Jesus. These servants of the Lord + Jesus would be sent out into the highways to find as many as they could to fill the Wedding Hall of Heaven through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Blessed Sacraments. This is the second half of the parable of our Lord + Jesus. The invitation goes out a second time. Those who rejected the first time, were not worthy of the Feast, and so their city was burned to the ground.

The invitation goes out a second time because of our Lord’s grace and compassion. His Wedding Feast must be filled. The servants go into the highways and through the means of grace invite all who would listen, both evil and good. They did not concern themselves with who was invited, they were only sent to call and invite everyone into the Wedding Feast. This task is the same for us today. We invite everyone to come into this holy house and hear the Gospel and receive the Sacraments, so that they may join us in the eternal Wedding Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom—the marriage of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church.

But even in this visible Church on Earth there dwell those who are not worthy—those who have no Wedding Garment. In not having a Wedding Garment; in only pretending to be a Christian; in being a Christian in name only, they show their disdain and dishonor for the Lord God, for the King offering the Wedding Feast. They are no different from those who were originally invited and refused to come

to the Wedding Feast. Those men were not worthy to attend the Wedding Feast, but those who are only Christians in name only, also show their unworthiness. This is why they are bound hand and foot and thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is a stark warning to all of us here in this place today.

Therefore, I repeat the question I posed earlier, how does one avoid such a fate? One acquires such a fate on account of their unworthiness; their disdain and honor of the Lord God Who provides them a place in the Wedding Feast.

This worthiness is not something that we have to drum up inside of ourselves. There is no worthiness in our works and merits. There is no salvation found inside of ourselves. Heaven or Hell is allotted to us not because of our being a good or bad person, as the world likes to believe. The prevailing theory in our world that as long as you are basically a good person you will go to Heaven is not what holy Scriptures teach. Scripture rather teaches that we are not worthy for the things which we receive solely from the grace and mercy of the Lord God Almighty.

We are made worthy on account of the King's Son, our Lord + Jesus Christ. It is His works and merits to which we cling to in faith. We cling to what He has done for us out of His love for us. He is the One Who through our Holy Baptism vested us in the garment of His righteousness. He has clothed us with the Wedding Garment in our Holy Baptism. And He continues to purify that garment whenever we remain faithful to the Church. When we live our daily lives in our Holy Baptism, daily drowning the Old Adam so that a new man emerges and lives before Christ in righteousness and innocence each new day. We daily confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, that we are unworthy of our Lord's grace and mercy. And through the preaching of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ into our ears we are strengthened in our faith each new day, as we remember and proclaim His death on our behalf.

We have been invited to the Wedding Feast through the means of grace. We share with one another a foretaste of the Feast which we will enjoy in Heaven when we come to this holy altar and kneel before our Lord + Jesus and receive from Him, by the hand of His servant, His very Body and Blood given in bread and wine. When we cling to Him in faith each new day, He continues to make us worthy to wear the Wedding Garment that He has given us.

Therefore, my dear friends, take heed that you do not disdain the Wedding Garment given to you in grace, for you will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those who dishonor our Lord and God are not willing to come to the banquet, and will be thrown out and destroyed eternally.

But our Lord + Jesus, the Son of the King of Heaven, continues to call us to come to the Wedding Feast. He continues to send us His servants to call us by the Gospel and the Sacraments so that we do not have to trust in our own unworthy acts, but we hear over and over again what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. He has conquered sin, death and the devil, and has won for us an eternal home in Heaven, where we will enjoy with all the saints and angels the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom clothed in our Lord + Jesus Christ's righteousness, forever and ever. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank Thee that, all things being prepared for our salvation, Thou didst call us to the Marriage-Feast of Thy dear Son, the Bridegroom of our souls; and we beseech Thee, cleanse and direct our hearts, that we may not reject Thy gracious invitation, but willingly follow Thy Word and, being clothed by faith with the garment of righteousness, obtain eternal life with all Thy elect; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!