

Living in the Father's Kingdom —
Wearing the Garment of Grace!

20th Sun. after Pentecost – 10/11/261 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 22:1-14 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 4 “Again he (the king) 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.’”

Introduction

✧ As we begin, I want to go back in time – 15 years ago and imagine it is January or February of 2011. I want you to imagine going to the mailbox, where you find an envelope that is obviously some kind of wedding invitation.

➔ When you look at the return address you see that this invitation came from Buckingham Palace! You think this must be some kind of mistake ... or maybe a joke. But as you open the invitation it is personally addressed to you and your family.

➔ Not only have you been invited, by the King and Queen of England to Prince William's (the future king) and Kate's royal wedding in April, but everything you would need in order to go has already been planned out and provided free of charge! Your travel expenses and arrangements are already handled; your room and board, food and expenses are all paid up. How would you respond? How would you mark the RSVP that is included?

✧ “But I don't even know the royal family,” I'm guessing most of us would say. Yet you check into it and you find that the invitation is indeed legitimate. “Well, I don't think I can get out of work”; “but I might miss out on my trip to mountains or the lake”; “I've got yard work and gardening to take care of and who would watch after the dog?” — are these possible reasons that you would return the RSVP marked “regretfully decline”?

➔ “And besides that,” you might say, “I don't have anything to wear to a royal wedding.” “And I certainly can't afford to go out and buy a formal wedding dress or tuxedo.” But then you notice inside the envelope is another piece of paper. It's a voucher to the fanciest clothing store in town and it says, “Please use this voucher to shop for and purchase new wedding garments for you and your entire family. No limit on price. Everything will be paid for in full by the King!”

➔ Now how do you respond? “Well, I just don't like to dress up”; “these fancy weddings aren't my cup of tea”; “I don't think I can find the time to get those new clothes. I'd have to miss the football game and my favorite TV show. And I'm too tired after work to shop for wedding clothes. And besides all of that, my friends would make fun of me if I dressed like that and went to the royal wedding.”

✧ I think most of us, if we really had received an invitation like that would have quickly said instead, “I'm coming!” “I don't care what it takes, to make it happen — I'm there!” And what if you refused such an elaborate and undeserved invitation? How would the King and Queen feel about that; after going to such an expense and effort to give you this free gift?

➔ You might say, “Who cares? They don't even know me? And I don't care if I know them anyway.” But then you see yet one more piece of paper in the invitation. It's a hand written note from the King and Queen themselves. And it says, “We are so excited to meet and see you at the wedding. We have reserved seats for you at our side during the wedding; in the royal carriage and also at the wedding feast afterward. Please come as our honored guests.”

I. The Father's Invitation — a relationship of grace!

✘ Well, my fellow redeemed Christians, as unlikely and amazing as all of that sounds, it still falls short in comparison to the very real and the genuine invitation that you and I have already received from our heavenly Father. It is the invitation that Jesus is talking about in our Gospel Reading today where He uses a parable to teach, warn and invite all people everywhere to come and enter into a very special relationship of grace.

➔ But how do we know this is such a special invitation? Jesus says in verse two, “The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” This is not just the king and queen of Great Britain; this is no earthly kingdom at all; ... this is the Kingdom of heaven! And therefore the King that He’s talking about is God the Father Himself!

➔ Whatever or whoever it is that you think of as being the absolute greatest place or person in this world; what and who we’re talking about here in this parable today blows that away with the tiniest little flick of His pinky finger.

✘ Jesus is talking directly here with the Jewish leaders of His day; the ones that should already have a close relationship with God. These are the ones that everyone would expect to be at the top of the invitation list.

➔ But, at the same time, Jesus is talking in the later part of the parable to every human being on this planet when He mentions the ones out on the “roads ... both bad and good” in verse 10.

➔ You see, the Father is not only giving a wedding feast for “His Son”, Jesus; to honor Him as the second person in the Holy Trinity; as the Word of God made flesh; as the fulfillment of all of His promises throughout the Old Testament.

No, He is celebrating as well, the love and relationship of His Son, Jesus with His lovely Bride! And who is His bride? She is the “new Jerusalem” proclaimed in Revelation 21:2; the gathering of all true believers in Christ; the one “holy Christian church, the communion of saints” as we confessed earlier in the Apostles’ Creed.

✘ This relationship of eternal, unconditional and undeserved love that the Father is celebrating with this feast is the relationship, my dear friends, that He desires to celebrate with you; each one of you ... and me, along with all people everywhere from every age throughout all of history.

➔ And just like the invitation we imagined receiving at the beginning from Buckingham Palace, this invitation, sent from the heavenly palace of paradise, is absolutely undeserved! We’ve done nothing and we can do nothing to get it. The King has prepared “everything” just as we’re told in verse 4.

➔ Today’s Old Testament Reading provides a clue as to how sumptuous and awesome this wedding and feast really is: “A feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (Isaiah 25:6). This is the best of the best in everything!

✘ What God’s ultimately talking about of course is the gift; the feast of salvation! You and I don’t deserve it; we can’t earn it; and yet it has all been taken care of; all completed by our Bridegroom, Jesus!

➔ The sacrifice has been made with Jesus crucified on the cross. He is the main course (if you will). He’s the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He’s the one that was announced to the Jews by the first wave of God’s servants, the prophets like Isaiah in our Old Testament Reading. There should have been no question when Jesus came that He was the promised Messiah; the Bridegroom promised to God’s people; the one through whom God the Father so strongly desires to bring the people of His creation back to Himself in forgiveness and love – and to do so with an eternal celebration.

II. Invitation rejected

✘ And yet look at how this relationship of grace has been received in the past and is still received by so many today.

➔ In the parable the first invitation is just rejected straight out. We're told that the invited guests just "would not come". The Jews and the secular rulers at the time of Jesus would not believe Jesus was the Son of God. They "would not come" to Him in faith.

➔ And so, as a sign of the Father's great faithfulness, compassion and yearning to be with His people He sent more messengers, like John the Baptizer, to call them to repentance and bring them back to the Father in faith. But what did they do? The parable says in verses five and six, "But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them."

➔ And, what do you know; John was beheaded for preaching the truth. Many people just went about their business and focused on their earthly priorities even when Jesus came and proclaimed as He did in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

✘ "Well," you and I are tempted to say, "at least we aren't like those people that rejected God's invitation." Are you sure? Is it not possible that this parable is also intended to be a warning for you and me still today?

➔ It's so easy for us to be like the Jews and say, "Hey, I believe in God. I don't need to go to the celebration that God has prepared for me; you know, that one that He offers every Sunday morning." "I've got business to attend to, things to do."

And before we know it, we've allowed our athletic events; our recreational activities; our jobs and hobbies; as well as our earthly relationships with family and friends to become our gods. And we not only turn down the invitation to be with the Father in His feast of Word and sacrament here at worship; but we abuse; we ignore; we put aside those people that God sends into our lives, like Pastors, elders, parents, grandparents and fellow Christians – the ones whom He has sent to invite us back; to encourage us in our struggles; to love us and celebrate with us the greatest and most important party ever!

✘ And why is this "the most important party ever"? Because whether or not you and I are there my friends; according to God, our attendance at this party is absolutely a matter of life or death! Those that reject the Father's invitation of grace; those who abuse His word and disrespect His messengers; ... according to the parable they end up destroyed; eternally separated from God; and as verse 13 says, "in that place [where there is] weeping and gnashing of teeth".

III. A new invitation of grace and a garment of grace

✘ But understand this, that is not God's desire for you; for me; or for anyone at all. In fact, because of His love He sends out new invitations even after His first have been rejected. He tells His servants to go out into the roads and gather all whom they can find, "both bad and good", He says.

➔ Again, it's not about a person's status, history, works or perceived importance in this world. He wants everyone to come without cost because His Son Jesus has already paid for everything with His blood.

✘ And notice the result of that gracious invitation, "the wedding hall was filled with guests" (v. 10). Do you see the amazing power of God's invitation; we call it His gospel. And we see it at work in His saving Word of truth that proclaims our forgiveness from sin by the loving sacrifice of the Bridegroom in our place.

- ➔ We see it applied to us in the water of Baptism where that Word, as it is poured out upon us, brings us not only into the wedding hall of the Father's Kingdom, but we are given and clothed with the most glorious wedding garment you can ever imagine. It's the robe of the Bridegroom Himself; the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers over all of our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells how we get it. It says that "for our sake [God the Father] made Him to be sin who knew no sin (that's Jesus), so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."
- ➔ In the parable the Father is so excited to meet His guests and get to know them that He comes out before the wedding to see them. But there He finds one person not wearing the proper attire. This man thought he was too good to wear Jesus. Perhaps he thought he deserved to be there by his own works, or that he wasn't even sinning when in fact he was or that he could get into heaven without Jesus — believing in some other so-called god. Those ideas are very common yet so far off base. It'd be like you or I rejecting that voucher from the King for the new wedding clothes and coming instead in sloppy, torn and dirty shorts and shirt.
- ✘ That is not us my friends, is it? Oh, I pray it never will be. For we who are baptized; we have all been clothed with Christ. Our sins were forgiven when Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross. And now we have the honor of being joy-filled participants in God's wedding feast.
- ➔ We are here in His church; He is our Father; He is our bridegroom in Jesus; He is our greatest love and our saving God.
- ✘ Dear friends, we must not be afraid nor ashamed to let the world around us see the garments that we wear. It's called "stewardship" and it's been described in many different ways.
- ➔ But really it's simply this: in all that we do; all that we say; all that we hear ... the way that we live our entire lives at work, at home, at school, here at church; we wear Jesus for everyone to see.
- ✘ Because, you see, you and I are now the Father's messengers. The wedding hall is never too full! Until we die dear Christian, the Father wants you and me to invite and tell and show others that we are His most honored guests; His children; His bride! We are Living in the Father's Kingdom; we are wearing His garment of grace with pride and with everlasting joy. So, let's celebrate! Let's make it obvious; shout it, whisper it, share it with everyone and invite them all — to "Come to the wedding feast" and be saved! Amen.