

# WHAT WILL YOU WEAR?

Matthew 22:1-14

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

October 15, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 22, verses 1 through 14. It is on page 699 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus tells a parable about the greatest feast. And the best part is, you're invited. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From Matthew 22, we begin reading at verse 1. We read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup> Again 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." ' <sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Bible compares Heaven to a feast. This seems to me, at least, to be the most common description of Heaven in the Bible. Or maybe it just stands out to me because I really like food. Who doesn't like a good feast?

Listen to the way the Bible describes Heaven. The prophet Isaiah calls it

"a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined" (Is. 25:6).

Now that sounds pretty good. And in the gospel lesson we just heard, Jesus compares it to a wedding feast thrown by a great king. His oxen and fattened calves have been slaughtered, and everything else is ready. This is the feast the king has been preparing for. But maybe you don't like wine. And maybe you prefer chicken to veal. That's probably okay. We're talking about the

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God who created the entire universe. I'm sure you'll be able to find something that is greater than anything you've ever experienced. This is the wedding feast *God* has been preparing for eternity. The only question is, *What will you wear?*

Finding something to wear to a wedding can be difficult. Girls have to consider the season, the current fashions, the wedding colors, and probably about forty-seven other factors. Guys consider two factors. We need something fancy enough that is also comfortable to eat in. I guess what we need is some really classy sweatpants, especially for a feast like the one Jesus is talking about. The expectation is that we feast to our heart's content.

When it comes to the feast of Heaven, the primary question really is, *What will you wear?*

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So let's consider this parable Jesus sets before us.

Parables are sort of a roundabout way of teaching something. Instead of coming right out and teaching plainly about the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus uses these stories. Perhaps he's trying to make us think about what he says. Sometimes he uses parables to actually hide things from people who think they're really smart. In parables like this one, I think the purpose is to illustrate just how radical the Kingdom of Heaven is. The stuff that happens in this parable is stuff that would never happen in real life. We have a king who comes across as a little too desperate, while his subjects come across as just plain stupid. So let's get to it.

First we have a king. This represents God the Father. He throws a wedding feast for his son. This would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When everything is ready and it's time for the guests to come, the king sends his servants to call the people who were invited. These are the people who got the "Save the Date." The king already told them the feast was coming, so they should be ready to come when the servants call them. These people represent the Jews in Jesus' day. They had Moses and the prophets, who all prophesied that God would send his Messiah—the Christ—so they should be waiting and watching for him. But many of the Jews refused to believe. To be sure, many of them did believe in Jesus, but many of them did not. The problem is, Jews are really just like everyone else in the world. So some of them believed, but most of them did not.

The servants represent the apostles—the disciples whom Jesus sent to proclaim the good news. So the servants go and call the invited guests to come to the feast. But they refused to come.

Now this is the first thing in the parable that just doesn't make any sense. When the king tells you to come to a feast, you come to the feast. For one thing, the king is the king. He has authority. When he tells you to do something, you do it. And second, kings throw the best feasts. They have access to all the best food, the biggest banquet hall, and the best musicians. When the king has a feast, you *want* to be there. But the invited guests refuse.

But the king really just wants to fill up his wedding hall and give away his feast. So he is patient and sends more servants. This time the instructions are clearer: **"See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding fest"** (22:4).

But the people still won't come. Two of them figured they should go to work instead, **"one to his farm, [and] another to his business"** (22:5). I don't know how to describe this, other than just plain stupid. Instead of sitting down and being served an extravagant feast in the king's luxurious banquet hall, they would rather go and work hard so they can have some mediocre

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food to eat in their mediocre little houses. They made a bad choice. But these guys look like righteous geniuses in comparison to the rest, because after they leave, things go from stupid to absurd. **“The rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them”** (22:6). Now this is not the way to respond when you get invited to a wedding. It’s one thing to kill the messenger, but it’s another thing to kill the messenger when he brings you *good news!*

This is one of those things we never expect to actually happen in reality, but it did, and it still does. When the apostles went out to tell the world that Jesus is the Son of God who was crucified and risen to forgive our sins and open heaven to us, they were killed for it. The apostle John was the only one of the twelve who didn’t lose his life for proclaiming that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It sounds absurd, but in many countries of the world, this same thing is still happening today.

So the king was angry and did the only sensible thing. **“He sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”** (22:7). He is patient, but not forever.

But now the king starts to look desperate. All he wants to do is fill up his wedding hall and give away his feast. He’s actively looking for wedding crashers. So he sends his servants out to the roads to gather all whom they find (22:10). This is really a move of desperation. These are the roads outside the cities. These people are strangers. Some of them are probably travelers from foreign countries who are just passing through. They have no business coming to the wedding feast of this king’s son. But the king doesn’t care about that. He just wants to fill up his wedding hall and give away his feast.

The travelers represent the Gentiles—the non-Jews. God shows no partiality. He is an equal-opportunity forgiver.

And the king made no distinction about who the servants should invite, so they are being perfectly obedient when they gather all sorts of people, **“both bad and good”** (22:10). Again, God is an equal-opportunity forgiver. He just wants to fill up his Heaven and give away his forgiveness. The king may come across as a bit desperate, but he finally got what he wanted. **“The wedding hall was filled with guests”** (22:10).

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But then there’s this issue of the guy with no wedding garment. And we see that even though the king appears desperate, he still has standards. In fact, his standards are quite high. Everything has to be perfect, even down to the detail of what his guests are wearing.

So we come back to this primary question: *What will you wear?* Perhaps by now you have figured out that it’s not really a matter of clothing. It’s really an issue of righteousness. What does God see when he looks at you?

As you’re browsing through your closet of good works, which of them are pure enough and righteous enough to make you presentable to God? And are these good works good enough to cover up our sins? Can they really hide our wickedness from the God who searches every heart and knows every secret? The answer, of course, is, *No; they can’t*. We might be able to find enough good works to make ourselves look attractive to other people. But that’s just because they’re sinners too, and they can’t see inside our hearts. They can’t see into the secret thoughts of our minds. And even if they could, they might not be too offended, because they have the same depraved thoughts of hatred, jealousy, and lust. So we can usually find enough good works to put on that make us presentable to other people. And there are two reasons for this:

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first, because they're sinners too, so they judge on a curve, and, second, because they usually only get to see the things we want them to see.

So when we put on our best behavior to come to something like church, we can usually fool the people around us. But what does that have to do with anything. That doesn't really matter. If how we look in the eyes of other people were really the important thing, then we wouldn't start every service with the words, "Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed."

To some it might seem strange or even humiliating to confess our sins every single Sunday. And if we were coming simply to deal with the other people around us, it would be very strange, and probably not a good idea. But we're not coming to deal with them. We are coming into the presence of the holy and righteous God. So when we confess our sin to God, we are admitting, *God, I have nothing to wear to the heavenly feast.*

And what does God do? How does he respond to our nakedness? Remember what the prophet Isaiah says,

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Is. 61:10).

God gives you the righteousness you need. It's like a garment. It's like a robe that just covers you completely.

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In the ancient world it was common, when a king or some kind of noble would have a big wedding feast, that he would provide all the wedding garments. And this is what happens in the parable of the wedding feast.

Clothing was very expensive in those days. They didn't have machines to churn it out. Every piece of cloth had to be woven by hand, and it took a long time. So many people only had one set of clothes. If you were a farmer, you would plow your field and milk your cow and eat your dinner and go to weddings all in the same clothes. Unless you were in the elite upper class, you probably only had one thing to wear. So when the king's servants find you traveling in the road and tell you to come to the wedding feast *right now*, you don't even think about going home to change, because you don't have anything else to wear. And if the king doesn't like what you're wearing, well then he's going to have to do something about it. And he does.

The king wants his wedding hall to be full of guests, and he wants them all to be perfectly dressed. And the only way to do this is to invite everyone he can find and give them all the clothes they need. And he does.

So everything is perfect. The rich food is all there, the wedding hall is full, and all the guests are perfectly dressed. So the king comes in to admire this glorious sight. But he sees something offensive. Some guy is just sitting there in his normal street clothes. Now how does that happen? I picture the king's servants standing at the doors handing out wedding garments. They try to hand a robe to this guy, but he just says, "No thanks; I'm good," and breezes right past them and goes in. But the king sees him and calls him out on it, and, of course, he has

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nothing to say. He has no excuse. The king tried to give him the clothes he needed, but he thought his street clothes were good enough.

But the king disagreed, so he gets kicked out. In fact, the king's reaction seems kind of harsh: **"Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** (22:13) Up until this point the king comes across as kind of desperate. He's willing to take strangers at the wedding feast. He doesn't even care if they're good or bad. He'll even give them the clothing they need. But now we see that he also has standards. In fact, his standards are quite high. Everything has to be perfect. And the king has done everything to make this feast perfect. But this guy—he thinks he's good enough, but he's not, and the king hates it. The guy rejects the king's gift, disrespects the son, and pollutes the feast. So the king throws him out.

Now, if the wedding feast is heaven—and it is—then the outer darkness into which this man is cast is hell. And we see in this parable, as we see in many of Jesus' parables, that hell is a real place, and there are real people who go there. But it's never because God desires them to go there. It's never because God didn't save them. God has done everything. He calls the whole world to his heavenly feast, and he provides every guest with the righteousness we need. He takes both bad and good.

But we see in this parable two things we really can't do. First, we can't ignore or reject God's call to the feast, and, second, we can't expect to get there by our own merits. We can't expect God to judge bad and good the same way we do. Who cares if your good works look better than someone else's? They won't be wearing their good works in Heaven. The only good works anyone will be wearing in Heaven are Jesus' good works. These good works are given freely to all who believe.

Jesus gives to you his robe of righteousness to cover all your sin. You stand before God righteous and pure because you stand there with Jesus' righteousness and purity. And you wear Jesus' righteousness, because he already wore your sin. Jesus has already played the part of a speechless and naked man, bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness. And he did it for you.

That's what the cross was—literally. At his trial he made no defense. He was speechless. Then he was stripped of his clothes. Talk about a man with no garment. That was Jesus—bound hand and foot by nails to a wooden cross while God cast darkness upon him. A speechless man with no garment, bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness. It's the fate you and I deserve. And it's exactly what Jesus wore for us. And, in exchange, he gives to you his pure and spotless robe of righteousness.

I'm not saying the man in the parable represents Jesus. He doesn't. But wherever we find judgment and condemnation, we shouldn't be too surprised to find Jesus on the receiving end. That's what the cross was—Jesus wearing our sin and shame and guilt in order to clothe us in his righteousness.

"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Is. 61:10).

Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.