

THE FEAST

Matthew 22:1-14

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

October 15, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 22, verses 1 through 14. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 22, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

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

¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For 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.

God invites you to a feast. He invites you to the greatest feast. He invites you to his new creation, where we will feast, and dance, and sing, and rest, and laugh with perfect joy forever and ever.

The Bible uses different descriptions for the new creation, or what we often call “heaven.” I suppose it uses different descriptions because one isn’t enough to capture the glory of it. Sometimes it describes the new creation as a worship service, with all the saints of God standing around his throne singing his praises. So I’ve heard people say that that’s all heaven will be, just one big, never-ending worship service where we sing forever. But that is, thank God, wrong, because that sounds really tiring. It doesn’t really appeal to me. I like to sing, but then I like to stop singing. So there are more descriptions of heaven. Sometimes it is described as rest, perfect rest. And often, like in this parable, it is compared to a feast.

This description resonates with me, because I like food. And a feast, there’s something almost euphoric about feasting with your close friends and family. I don’t mean gluttony, but

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that point where your belly is filled with wonderful food, then you sit back and share stories, laugh, rest, and have dessert. A feast like that is an all-around satisfying experience.

In the Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah called 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 is ready. This is the feast the king has been preparing for. 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. But God has the perfect solution.

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

First we have a king. This represents God the Father. He throws a wedding feast for his son. That's Jesus, of course. 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, so they should be waiting and watching for him. But many of the Jews refused to believe. Now, many of them did believe in Jesus, but many 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 are the apostles, whom Jesus sent to proclaim the good news. They call the invited guests to come to the feast. But they refused.

Now this is the first thing in the parable that just doesn't make any sense. When the king calls you to a feast, you go. For one thing, he 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 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 they still won't come. Two of them figured they should go to work instead, **“one to his farm, another to his business”** (22:5). I don't know how to describe this, other than just plain stupid. Some historical context will help explain. At that time, people didn't eat meat every day. It would have been expensive and just not practical. When you butchered a cow or a sheep, you had to finish the thing quickly before the meat turned bad. It's not like today where you just pull

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out some ham and make a sandwich. Meat was not an everyday thing. So if you were invited to eat free meat, you did it. But instead of sitting down and being served an extravagant feast in the king's luxurious banquet hall, these guys would rather go and work hard so they can have some mediocre food to eat in their mediocre little houses.

The stupidity of this is like us when we prefer the earthly to the heavenly. God promises us all the riches of heaven, but we seek meaning in our mediocre little houses. And we seek the corrupt wisdom of the world instead of the Word of God.

There are three things I don't understand. I'll give you one of them today, and this is the biggest one. I do not understand why not everyone in the world is a Christian. The evidence for Jesus being the Christ and the Son of God is so strong, and the promises are so sweet, that I do not understand why anyone would reject it. How could anyone hear the Gospel and not cherish it above everything else they've ever heard? It's as stupid as turning down the king's invitation to the feast of the century. But then I look at my own heart, and I see that I don't love and cherish like I should. I know what it is, and I know that it's true, but the same stupidity lives in my heart. I'm still obsessed with my bank account and the weeds in my backyard. I'm still like the guys who go to work instead of the feast.

But these guys look like righteous geniuses compared 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 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, most of them were killed for it. And it has continued for thousands of years. 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 a move of sheer desperation. These roads are outside the cities. The people are strangers. Some of them are 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. This would be like if no one comes to your daughter's wedding, so you go out to I-29 and you flag down everyone from Manitoba: truckers, cars, RVs, and tour buses. The travelers represent the Gentiles, that is, 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 desperate, but he finally got what he wanted. **"The wedding hall was filled with guests"** (22:10).

There is a call to evangelism in this. We see the will of God. He "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:4). Evangelism is not just the job of the pastor. You might have far more opportunities for evangelism than I do. So apply this to

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every person you can think of. Who does God want at his feast? You, of course. Who else? How about your family? He wants them at his feast. Your friends? Your neighbors? Your coworkers? Your classmates? All of these are precious eternal souls, created by God, whom he desires to save and bring into his eternal kingdom. There is nothing more important. Evangelism is simply inviting people to the feast. The easiest way to do this is to invite people to church. This is God's Kingdom on earth. It's a foretaste of the heavenly feast. Here, in worship, God forgives our sins and promises us a seat at his feast in the new creation. He just wants to fill up his Heaven and give away forgiveness.

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*. So God clothes you with the righteousness you need. It's like a garment. It's like a robe that just covers you completely.

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

Clothing was expensive and difficult to produce. 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, 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. 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. How does that happen? I picture the king's servants standing at the doors handing out wedding garments. I suppose that's probably how it was. They try to hand a robe to this guy, but he says, "No thanks; I'm good," and breezes right past them and goes in. But the king sees him and calls him out. And, of course, he has nothing to say. He has no excuse. The king tried to clothe him, 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 desperate. He takes strangers. He doesn't care if they're good or bad. He even gives them the clothing they need. But

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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 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 is Hell. So 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 wants them to go there. And 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 righteousness. 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 are covered 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. He wore our sin, so that we can wear his righteousness.

God has prepared his feast, the new creation. He invites you to come. And he even clothes you with the proper attire: the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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