

Matthew 22.1-14
20th Sunday after Trinity
25 October 2020
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

So what do we have here. We have a big party—a feast. The marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. The eternal feast.

We've got clothing, too. Party clothes. For do you not know that as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ?

We've got invitations. For what is the Gospel, but an invitation. It's certainly nothing compulsory. No one believes with a gun to his head. It's a message that's sweet and inviting. The enticement of God to flee sin and death in the wounds of His Son.

Oh, and we've got messengers. Servants of God the Father tasked with what you'd think would be a fantastic thing. They get to go out and tell the sweet, inviting message. They get to tell the world that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven. That when they believe it they're already safe—and eternally saved in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. And they bring along carts full of sopping wet baptismal party clothing to hand out. The master of the feast doesn't even expect them to buy wedding clothes. With one hand the messengers give them the invitation. With the other they give them brand new wedding clothes—and they "put on" Christ.

And then we have the partygoers. Or, well, at least people who're invited. Four different kinds of them.

The first group pays the invitation no attention at all. They have better things to do. Whatever eternal salvation is it's not for them. For it's not the Lamb in His Kingdom who's their God, but the world. It's not the gracious Master, God the Father, before whom they bow down, but, when you get right down to it, the prince of this world. Isn't that so, when your farm and business—whatever that might be—is more important than this divine invitation? And it's not the sweetness of God the Holy Spirit's preaching they desire to taste. Instead, they prefer the sugar coated bitterness of this world—the sin that masquerades as fun, the death they drink to forget, the drum beat of the horror of hell they drown out by the shrill piping of every imaginable pleasure they can derive from this life. That's the first group. The invitation gets placed in their hand, and they file it away in the junk mail. You don't want to be those people.

The second group hears the invitation and hates it—hates it! It baffles the mind! But read Romans chapter one, and you'll see why. It's the sad history of humankind. "Claiming to be wise they became fools" because they did not know God, Paul says. "God gave them up to a debased mind," Paul says, "since they did not see fit to acknowledge God." God gave them just what they wanted. And so "they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice," "envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness," "gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, haughtiness, boastfulness, the invention of evil, disobedience to parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness." That's the sad story of man left to his own devices. If you're addicted to something, you hate whatever's going to put an end to it. Try to get between a coke addict and his blow. So these people don't just rip up the invitation. They kill the messengers themselves. You don't want to be those people, either. For like the group that pays the invitation no attention, they're destroyed in the everlasting fire.

The third group, well, who knows exactly where they come from. Maybe they heard there was to be a party. Maybe they even got invited. Maybe they even got baptized and got their wedding clothes. But whatever happened between invitation and feast, they forgot all about their Baptism. In fact, they lost it. No longer enjoying their Baptism in faith in what God gives there—the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, eternal salvation, a lifetime of His preached Word, a lifetime of receiving the Meal that is a foretaste of the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom—well, they took their wedding clothes, stuffed ‘em in a plastic bag, and put ‘em up in the attic to collect dust. And, too little too late—the time for the wedding feast had come—the Lord Jesus had returned to judge the living and the dead—they showed up at the judgment, remembered with the kind of pit in their stomach what they once had and what they might still be able to get—and tried to sneak in the backdoor. Beloved in the Lord, *now* is the time of grace, not then. Now God gives you His invitation, clothing, and gifts. But if you don’t receive them now, you can’t receive them then. You don’t want to be those people, either. For they, too, are cast into the everlasting fire.

So those are the first three groups.

Now, look, here’s the crazy thing. Every single one of those groups are “the usual suspects.” They’re exactly the ones you’d expect to show up for the wedding feast. Why? Because they got the invitation. And they got it first.

But now we enter into the mystery of the salvation of the Gentiles. God had called His own people out of Egypt and gave them the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. That’s how big the invitation was. It was written on a chunk of land that’s, well, the size of a whole country. Every day a Jew woke up he literally stood on dirt that was God’s invitation. Three times annually, sometimes even five, every Jew walked over that dirt invitation to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts that pointed to the Bridegroom, the coming Messiah. That was God’s constant invitation, too. And the Lord sent the prophets; they, too, with the invitation, but the first invited didn’t listen. Instead, they killed them.

You’d think that would have put a permanent end to it all.

But if you think that, then you don’t have the right measure of your heavenly Father. The feast is too expensive—its cost is counted in the blood of His Son, not in dollars and cents, shekels or denarii. The gift is too great—an extrication from the misery of our sin-filled world and an eternal rescue from death. And His pity for His fallen creation is so immense that He not only takes whomever He can get, He even sent His Son into the flesh to die not just for those who first received the invitation, the Jews, but for Romans. Not just for the descendants of Abraham, but for Gentiles. For Germans and Americans and French and Chinese. You can’t name a people for whom Jesus didn’t die, because He is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the *world*. And the wedding clothes purchased by the death of Jesus, His Baptism? It’s one size fits all. There’s no pigmy or giant, no ethnic body type so large or small, but that the clothing of Christ won’t fit him. Jesus told the eleven to make disciples of *all* nations. By baptizing them. And with His Baptism He promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on *all* flesh. You see, He’s a God who loves to save. In fact, that’s what Jesus’ name means: The Lord saves. You can’t know God apart from Jesus. You can’t possibly know who Jesus is unless you know Him as the Lord who saves. And that—that’s the right measure of your heavenly Father.

So what would you expect God to do? Try once or twice and throw up His hands and say, “I’m so done with this. To hell with ‘em all”?

Hardly. Instead He turns to the least likely—to those along the highways and byways and hedges. From the Jews to the Gentiles. But even this according to His eternal plan and purpose. “Those who were not My people I will call ‘My people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God,’” the LORD says in Isaiah.

Those are the people you *want* to be. And so you are. His people. His beloved. Sons of the living God. Recipients—at last—of God’s gracious invitation. Dressed up for the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom in your soaking wet wedding garments. Solely by the eternal, undying grace of the God who saves.

Amen.

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