

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus is addressing the religious leaders of the day at the beginning of the Gospel reading. It convicted them in their unbelief and apathetic attitude toward God's Kingdom found in Christ. The Messiah had come, and all was ready, yet they did not feast with him, they did not listen. Instead of heeding the voice of the prophets and promises made to them, they answered with killing the very one who came to be their redemption. The first part of parable addresses this all, "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 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.'" 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. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

The Jews didn't want to be bothered by Jesus. They had one excuse after another, they had better things to do, or they just flat out rejected the Lord. Something happened though. They would see Jerusalem pillaged and the temple destroyed. Their holy city would become a pile of ruin and ash as the king would not let their rejection of his son go unnoticed. God's wrath burns against sin. The murderers and their city would be destroyed, God cannot be mocked, and he always has the last word. To the shame of those people and out of the abundant mercy of the king, however, the word goes out far and wide. Jesus went on in the parable, "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 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."

The king was throwing a banquet for his son, and he wanted people there. You can't pull a fast one on the king, if he wants his hall full of people, he will get it full of people. There's plenty of room and plenty of food at the feast for those whom the king calls to the feast. God is going to accomplish his will even despite the absurd actions of men that reject his gracious invitation. This first part of the parable makes all this clear and shows too that God's word goes out to all peoples and nations. The fault never lies with God, the fault always lies with man. The king's invitation goes out and it shouldn't surprise us one iota that people make ridiculous excuses and reject it all.

The second part then gets a bit interesting when Jesus speaks about the king looking over the feast. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 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.' For many are called, but few are chosen." If the first part of this parable teaches how all are invited it by no means implies that everyone automatically has a place. God is no universalist. You aren't entitled to be at the feast. The gospel is for all yet all are not saved.

This is where you fit into all of this as you sit here this morning and listen to this Gospel reading. Are you a bit uncomfortable yet? Well, you should be if you aren't. This is a hard saying before you in the reading. Jesus ended the parable by going back into his words addressing the crowd teaching them what he had just said, "For many are called but few are chosen." Now do you get it? Are you listening now? Where are you in all of this? Ask yourself this question, "Am I lacking the wedding garment?" When the king looks around the room and sees the feast are you exposed for who you are and left without anywhere to hide?

It's always easy to turn things in the church into an outward looking perspective. It's easy on the one hand to hear harsh words in the bible but it's another thing to apply them to ourselves within the church. Our sinful nature is really good at that and wants to think of God's call to repentance as something for those people who are outside the walls of the church, and it is for them, but it's for you as well. There's a call to sober thinking, to keep watch on yourself lest the day come upon you like a thief unaware and you find yourself naked at the feast.

The Epistle reading today warns you about your life in this world and is written to those who are baptized, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Your lives are to be lived with this in mind. Take this to heart what God says to you today. Look around you and look at yourself. Your life is short. The days are short. The days are also evil, God says. Don't be a fool but each day when you get up in the morning stand up as one who remembers and lives what God has called you to be as his baptized child. Know full well that the mercy of God is toward you as you have been called out of this world and into the Kingdom of God which has no end. Go about your day as one who understands it's a gift that you can get up in the morning and even have air to breathe and daily bread to feed your body. When you go about your work or the things you have on your list for the day complete them as someone who is wise in the ways of God not using the day and your work as a cover up for evil rather to serve your neighbor and as a fruit of your faith in Christ.

When you are tempted to forget the things of God or tempted to start turning your back on the Lord and his church and making lame excuses then think long and hard about this man in the reading who was thrown into the outer darkness. He wanted to be at the feast on his own terms and he didn't belong. Think about that and be warned now so that it's not you on that day when you stand before the Lord. Do you want the Lord to look at you and judge based on yourself and your own merits? When you look at yourself you see you don't belong at the feast, this isn't for you.

So where does that leave you? It all comes back to God's mercy, then, doesn't it? You see in your life that God has called you his own and given you a place at his feast here in the church now and points you to the eternal feast to come. Based on your own self, though, you see where you desire to be, and you see all the times you have either ignored God's invitation or simply put

something else in place of it. But when you humble yourself and you see there's nothing more important than Christ and his word then everything else falls into place. No excuse is reasonable and nothing else matters in comparison with the eternal things of God. Fixing your eyes on Christ crucified you see that you indeed have a place before God because of him and his work for you. Understanding and believing the Gospel you would and do whatever it takes to hear God's word and receive his sacraments. And this is all in humility as you place your sin on Christ who has atoned for it. Rather than standing proudly before God's throne you stand justified covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness and claim no merit except the merit of Jesus who has lived, died, and is risen again for you.

The call goes out, "all is ready." It's here right now. Don't make excuses but go to where Christ has promised to be for you. "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Jesus is right, many are called but few are chosen. This parable from Matthew is referenced in the Formula of Concord in the article on election and takes a great deal from a sermon of Martin Chemnitz on it. When you hear this parable know who God is and what he says about you. God is merciful toward you in Christ. So, taste and see that this means you. You are his chosen people. This feast is for you. God has given you his word, your baptism, confession and absolution, and the Lord's Supper to not only assure you that you are his chosen people but to give it to you in these means. So, rejoice that God is at work in your life even now and gives you great comfort and consolation. These words of Jesus today humble you, but they also exalt you as you see your Lord has called you his own and forgives your sin and keeps calling you. He has chosen you as his own, don't doubt that for one minute. You are God's people. Rejoice, "All is ready." Feast now and feast forever.

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