

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

“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.”

God admonishes you in the Gospel reading today to make the best use of the time because the days are short or as the Epistle reading says, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” He warns you, on the one hand, with the those who try to make excuses and he comforts you, on the other, with the great generosity and mercy of your Lord who clothes you with himself and gives you a place at his banquet.

The lesson starts off with, “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.’” Getting into this parable, a little context is warranted for us to recall and consider today, and we hear and mediate upon what God says to us. Right before our reading today, Matthew 21 ends with the parable of the Tenants. Remember that Parable. A master planted and owned a vineyard and sent his servants to get his fruit when the time came for it to be harvested. The tenants, whom the master leased the vineyard to, beat one servant, killed another, and stoned another. Again, the master sent servants, this time even more and they did the same. Then the master sent his son thinking, “they will respect my son.” Then something terrible happens, as if what happened already wasn’t terrible enough. Jesus said in the parable, “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”

After telling this point, Jesus followed it with a question and the people answered his question. Jesus said, “When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

Finally, after telling all this, Jesus tells what this is about, warning them, and what will take place. Jesus said, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.’ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”

Now enters today’s parable. There are two parts to this parable Jesus told. The first part deals with our Lord’s rejection which serves a warning to us. Let’s listen again to that parable told by the Lord. “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.”’”

Next the excuses come. This is how the devil likes to operate. He likes us to package up our sinful thoughts and actions with what appear to be reasonable to the world or seem to have an element of good to them. This just is a tactic to take our eyes off the King and what he does as it’s not complicated. The King invited them to this wedding feast for his son and they rejected it. They rejected this gracious invitation of the King who showing them kindness and mercy and they wanted nothing to do it with it with excuse after excuse. The King responds, Jesus tells us, “The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

But what happened after this? Did the King cancel the feast? Did he just simply say, well I shouldn't have bothered them, they are busy people. No. The King desired people to be there to celebrate the wedding of his son. Jesus tells us, "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 is still gracious and desires the wedding feast to have guests fill the hall.

I think it is pertinent that a bit of a side discussion that relates to our text this morning is warranted. I've been getting many questions lately regarding what's going on in the Middle East. No matter how much you try to look at all the angles, it's terrible. War is terrible. People killing each other and dying at the hands of one another is terrible. What is, perhaps, even more terrible, and deadly, though is when well-meaning people try to draw God into this fight.

Today's Gospel reading helps make that point very clear. Jesus is addressing these religious leaders of the day. These are the Jewish leaders and people who heard Jesus preach, they saw him fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. They saw him work miracles that pointed to him as the Son of God and yet, they rejected him. They made many excuses, sought to kill Jesus, and crucified the Son of God. The people rejected the invitation of the King.

Later on Jesus said 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 Gospel goes out to all nations, it's bigger than just some group of people. Still, there were some Jews who believed in Christ during his life like the apostles and many others. There were and are some after he his death, resurrection, and ascension, as St. Paul himself testifies, he was one of them. The Gentiles heard the gospel and were brought into the church. The new Israel is the church. It's people from all nations and languages whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith in Christ and gathered as his people receiving the word and sacraments.

Romans 10 and 11 address how Israel rejected the Christ and he was a stone of offense to them. So, how are you as Christians supposed to view Israel today? The answer to that is twofold. The first is that you must understand who the new and true Israel is now and will be even unto life everlasting. It's you, the church. God's people are those who believe in Christ just like it was in the Old Testament. They looked forward and anticipated his coming. Now he has come and accomplished your salvation.

The second part of how you should view Israel is one that is seen through a political lens. I don't mean political in terms of Republican or Democrat but in a way that views it as a nation of this world. Like England, Germany, or Spain, Israel is a nation. It's a nation that is a strong ally of ours and we have good relations and trade. We view them in this way. Yes, they do have history and historical places in the Bible but that does not give them any special standing. If, God forbid, Israel would be wiped off the map it would not do any harm or damage to your Christian faith. Think about the Temple. Jesus fulfilled the Temple and is the Temple not built with hands. And God used political powers to destroy the Temple and level Jerusalem because they rejected Jesus and Jesus references that in the parable today and the parable before it in Matthew 21.

So, what should be your attitude toward Israel? Don't go the other direction and persecute them or wish their harm, that is wrong too. Instead do as Jesus teaches you to do for all people. Pray for them. Pray for peace because war is terrible. Pray for the people on both sides that they do not seek to harm one another. Pray especially that Christ would be proclaimed to all, the people repent and trust Christ as their Savior. God commands you in 1 Timothy 2:1-4, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

20th Sunday after Trinity—October 22, 2023

thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

With all of this, examine your life. See that the invitation goes out. See that it goes out to you and calls you to see your life before God. 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.

“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.”

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 didn't have a wedding garment. Some commentators have written how it was not uncommon for a host to give a garment to his guests at the feast. This man though, was lacking. 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.

Where does that leave you? The King threw a wedding feast for his Son and wanted people to come and feast. The King was generous and rejoiced at the marriage of his Son. The King is gracious. 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 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. God has clothed you

20th Sunday after Trinity—October 22, 2023

with the wedding garment of his Son and you stand righteous and spotless with blemish or stain before him. The confidence you have is found in Christ, your bridegroom.

Beautifully the call goes out from the servants, “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. He’s talking about you. This parable from Matthew is referenced in the Formula of Concord in the article on election and takes a great deal from a sermon Martin Chemnitz preached on it.

This morning and every time when you read and 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. You are the new Israel, the church. 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.

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