

Matthew 22:1-14
"Come! Everything is Ready!"
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 11, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

As the title figure in the movie *Father of the Bride*, Steve Martin does everything he can do to cut the cost of his daughter's upcoming wedding. He tries on his old tuxedo that he has outgrown. He offers to be the backyard chef at the outdoor reception. He even slashes the guest list down to a minimum.

But, when the King in today's parable sends out invitations to His Son's wedding, He doesn't even think of cutting the cost of this wedding. Instead, He invites everyone! He says no expense will be spared! He says no guests will be crossed off His list! This is a wedding banquet that no one would want to miss, and the King says, "***Everything is ready! Come!***" The question for us is: are we ready? Are we ready to come to the wedding feast?

[Holy Week in Jerusalem]

On this Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, we continue listening to Jesus during Holy Week. As we heard last week, Jesus has already made His Palm Sunday triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the joy of the crowds sitting upon a colt as the crowd spread their cloaks upon the road and shouted, "***Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!***" (Matthew 21:9).

But, ever since Jesus entered Jerusalem, the Jewish chief priests have been watching Jesus very closely as they have been searching for a right time to arrest Him and ultimately have Him killed. So, since the Jewish chief priests are nearby, Jesus speaks parables to them. You know, *these earthly stories with heavenly meanings*, as He describes the kingdom of heaven, as well as to warn them and us of God the Father's final judgement. In each parable, Jesus warns us of His very real and coming judgement and His promise of eternal life for the righteous.

[The Parable of the Wedding Feast]

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us the Parable of the Wedding Feast that has been prepared and we are *all* invited to come and partake of this gracious feast. He teaches us 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...”*** (Matthew 22:2-3a).

In today's world, we send out “Save the Date” notices. This is what the King has done by sending His servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast. Here, the King is alerting His wedding guests that a big event is coming. In case you're wondering, the King here is God the Father and the Son is Jesus.

The date is set! The wedding hall is ready! The feast of rich food and well-aged wine has been prepared! (Isaiah 25:6) This feast will be lavish! This is not just an ordinary wedding; this is in fact, a royal wedding! Everything is ready!

“...but they would not come” (Matthew 22:3b).

Where are the invited guests? All that hard work and not a single person shows up! This is plain rude. I'm sure we can all sense the King's frustration. He felt much like modern parents do when sending out wedding invitations and the guests don't show courtesy to at least RSVP!

So, who are the servants and who are the invited guests? The servants are the prophets who are proclaiming the coming of the promised Messiah and Lord. The invited guests are the Jewish authorities, such as the chief priests and elders.

But the King did not give up on having guests at His Son's wedding feast! So, ***“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’”*** (Matthew 22:4).

So, did this group of new wedding guests come at the invitation of the King?

No. Instead ***“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”*** (Matthew 22:5).

The wedding hall is ready, and no one wants to come. Instead, one went off to his farm. Another went off to his business. These sorts of excuses are no excuse. This actually serves as an almost unthinkable act of shaming the King and His Son.

Instead of rejoicing at being invited to the royal wedding feast, the guests just find excuses not to go. Here, Jesus is referring to Israel's persistent rejection of its prophets, who proclaimed God's truth, but the people would rather ignore God's watchmen.

Does this sound familiar? Are we often too busy? Do we often find excuses not to come to the wedding feast?

How often do we fail at keeping the Sabbath day holy? Do we always fear and love God above all things so that we do not despise preaching and His Word by keeping it sacred by gladly hearing and learning it?

As sinful human beings, we are experts at coming up with excuses for anything. In 2020, the newest excuses are our new national idols known as "comfort" and "safety."

Many of us would rather stay at home than be at the foretaste of the feast to come at the Divine Service out of fear of large crowds. Yet, most of us have continued shopping and dining among large crowds. For some reason, that fear subsides in big box stores and while sitting in the restaurant booth. But, out of fear for our personal "comfort" and "safety," many of us choose to avoid the Divine Service, even though true eternal comfort and safety are found only here through the merit and work of Jesus Christ alone.

We must repent of our sin of not trusting God and instead placing our trust in the idols of "comfort" and "safety." You see, as soon as we get out of bed each morning, we begin to take risks that could end our temporal life. And, even if we follow every rule to not contract the virus, we will never be immune. Instead, we are to trust in Jesus, so that if any of us would contract the virus, we may understand that God is using it for our own good, so that we would trust Him even in our afflictions.

As we have those who make excuses, there were other guests in our parable who were not indifferent. They did not search for an excuse. Instead, they **“seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them”** (Matthew 22:6). Instead of greeting the invitation, they just turned violent. They said, **“No! I am not coming to this!”** And then they killed the messenger.

Although the feast is ready, the King will not allow the murderers of His servants to go unpunished. The King does what we may expect: He became angry. So, **“he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”** (Matthew 22:7). This is in fact, divine judgment. This judgement has come because the Jewish religious leaders have, by and large, rejected the King’s Son and the reign of God present in the Son’s words and deeds.

Even after all of this, the King shows His patience as He continues to say: **“Come, the wedding feast is ready!”** Now, would you keep inviting people after they continuously refuse to come? Not to mention, the deaths of His servants?

But this time, the King invites even more people. He invites not just the Jews, but also the Gentiles – the people without Jewish blood – as He says, **“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”** (Matthew 22:8-10a).

And, guess what? I guess the third time is really the charm! These invited guests come! The wedding hall was filled with guests! But for those who came to the wedding feast, were they all ready? Since both bad and good were invited, both bad and good arrived. Since this King is gracious, He visits each guest – *both bad and good* – to see that they are ready for the feast.

As the King greets everyone, He adorns each guest with a wedding garment, so that each guest would be ready. This wedding garment signifies the righteousness of God, which covers our sin. This garment – *the robe of righteousness* – is what we receive at our Baptism – the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all of our sin. But, as the King looks over the crowd, He notices that not everyone is ready. **“He saw there a man who had no wedding garment”** (Matthew 22:11b).

So, the King says to this guest, **“*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’***” (Matthew 22:12-13).

You see, even when addressed kindly as **“*friend,*”** this man has no excuse, no explanation for refusing the clothing the King has offered him. So, instead of wearing the robe of righteousness, this man chose to go it alone by not wearing the King’s wedding garment.

As human beings, we each have free will. We can look back at the grace received in our Baptism and repent of our sins against God the Father and receive His forgiveness that was won for us upon the cross, or we can choose to live in sin as we choose to walk it alone without Christ. For this man, he chose to walk it alone, and for that, he was cast into outer darkness. He was cast into hell, away from God and His grace.

Jesus concludes saying, **“*For many are called, but few are chosen*”** (Matthew 22:14). This means: **all are called, but not everyone is ready.**

[Are We Ready for the Wedding Feast?]

The question for us this morning is this: how do we know we are ready for the wedding feast?

Well, we cannot become ready on our own. We cannot become ready by going about our lives alone. We can only become ready through the merit and work of Jesus Christ alone!

You see, God freely gives us His robe of righteousness, which is His wedding garment for you and me. We are spiritually given this at our Baptism. In fact, the white garments often worn at Baptisms is a symbol of the robe of righteousness. And, when we are called home to the heavenly feast, the funeral pall again symbolizes Christ’s righteousness that covers all our sin. But, in heaven, we will all be actually wearing our robe, our wedding garment in the Church Triumphant.

So, how do we keep ourselves from losing the robe of righteousness? Actually, God accomplishes that for us too. He does this by strengthening our weak faith and forgiving our sins through hearing His Word and partaking of His Sacrament.

Whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we receive a glimpse of this heavenly feast to come! With these very words, "***Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,***" this shows us that in this Sacrament, we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation!

With these words, Jesus invites and urges everyone who is united with Him in doctrine and faith to partake of the Sacrament frequently. For we all need the comfort and strength of Christ's forgiveness for living our new life – *our justified and sanctified life* – while we are assaulted by the devil and struggle with our sinful nature.

You see, in the Lord's Supper, we receive Christ's very body and blood that forgives our sins and strengthens our weak faith. By receiving the Lord's Supper, we learn to trust in Jesus and to live in love for one another.

However, the opposite is true for those who choose to remain far from the Lord's Supper as their faith is weakened. Picture it this way, if you are hungry, you eat. If you do not eat when you are hungry, you will eventually die from starvation.

Or, if you are ill or physically injured, you seek medical help. If you don't, your illness or injury will get worse. The same goes with faith. If we are not receiving strength for our faith, our faith becomes weaker. So, do not starve yourself of the Sacrament of the very body and blood of Christ! Because of this, the Lord says, "***Come!***" He urges us to come and be nourished in the foretaste of this heavenly feast!

You see, as the King, God the Father invites everyone to the marriage feast of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who Himself is the bridegroom. But are we just invited guests? Are we just onlookers at this glorious event? No! This feast is actually *for us*! In fact, *we* are the bride!

We are the bride that the Bridegroom suffered and died for. We are bride that the Bridegroom rose from the dead for. We are the Church that the Bridegroom will raise again on the Last Day! This wedding feast is the union of Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church!

In the hymn "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying" this wedding banquet between Jesus and His Church is portrayed. Each time we sing the pronoun "she" in this hymn that is us – the Church. Stanza two concludes proclaiming:

*We enter all the wedding hall
To eat the Supper at Thy call.*

You see, through the very suffering and death of Jesus upon the cross, He has earned a place for everyone in the kingdom of heaven! And, not just a place, but a royal place as we who believe and trust in Him are His bride!

Now, some will ignore this invitation. They will find excuses, such as they are too busy, or it's not safe. Of course, daily work and "safety" is not evil in itself. However, it becomes an issue when it is chosen above the wedding feast of God the Father's own Son. So, does – I'm too busy, I have a career to build, I have a living to earn, I'm focusing on my personal safety, or are you leaving only an afterthought for the Savior – does any of this describe you?

And, what about those who oppose this invitation? By opposing, they are opposing Jesus, and are rejecting God the Father's invitation to His wedding feast, that is, the invitation to be His bride, His people.

Some will accept God the Father's invitation on their own terms, but not on the His terms. They plan to clothe themselves in their own deeds, their own fervent prayers, and their own good name. They will have no excuse when asked why they did not instead clothe themselves in the righteousness offered to them in Jesus Christ.

But in His grace and mercy, the King – God the Father – extends the invitation. In Baptism, God the Father provided us garments of righteousness that we may wear into eternity. These garments – the robes of Christ's righteousness that covers all of our sin – was won for us by His Son's death and resurrection!

Yes, we who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness are ready for the wedding feast! We have no need to be anxious by fear and worry (Philippians 4:6), since the Lord has prepared a place for you and me! We know that we are ready as our faith is strengthened each time we hear His Word and receive His Sacrament.

As long as we remain clothed in Christ's righteousness, we are ready for the wedding feast! **Come, everything is ready!** Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠