

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 22:1–14

Sermon: “The Banquet is Ready

Following on the heels of last week’s parable, Jesus is still speaking to the religious leaders of Israel. It is near the end of his ministry. Tensions are mounting; hate is increasing. And it’s clear that the religious establishment of God’s own people has rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Immediately before this text, we are told that the chief priests and Pharisees were seeking to arrest Jesus (21:45–46). And immediately after we’re told that they went and plotted how to entangle him in his own words.

But Jesus isn’t finished yet. He tells a parable about the kingdom of heaven, not eternity, but God’s kingdom as it exists already here on earth. It is as if Jesus were speaking from the perspective of Judgment Day and looking back over the history of God’s people. He likens it to a king (God the Father), who prepared a wedding banquet (eternal life in heaven). And God’s kingdom on earth is compared to all that happens in between.

The king sends his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet (the Old Testament people of God, the children of Abraham, in the first instance)—to tell them that all was ready and that they should now come.

But they refused. Just like in last week's Gospel, when the wicked tenants in the vineyard refused to hand over the fruits of the harvest, so now these invitees refused to come to the banquet.

But the king didn't give up. He is ***"merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"*** (Psalm 86:15). He sends some more servants and says to them, ***"Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner"*** (v 4). Give them more details about my lavish dinner. Tell them that several of my finest cattle have been prepared. There is rich food, aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines (Isaiah 25:6). Everything is prepared to perfection! Come to my wedding banquet!

Nevertheless, again even after this second summons the guests in our parable refused.

This time their refusal was varied: in some cases, plausible and seemingly polite; in others, violent and crass. One went to his field (representing the agricultural cares of this world). Another went to his business (representing the commercial cares of this world). Their excuses are reminiscent of Paul's description of the enemies of the cross of Christ whose ***"god is their belly, . . . with minds set on earthly things"*** (Philippians 3:19).

Those were the polite ones. Still others who were invited seized the servants, roughed them up, and finally killed them! Is there any doubt that many of God's prophets, apostles, and preachers have been treated the same throughout the centuries? And it is still happening today in many parts of the world. "Death to the messengers of the only true God!"

So, the king was enraged. Time had run out on his mercy and grace. Now remember, the king is the Lord Almighty. And there is such a thing as God's righteous anger. They lie who tell you that our loving God could never become angry or punish or kill.

Just read the Bible (the Psalms, for example) to see otherwise! The king was enraged. And he sent his army to destroy those murderers. We think here of the end of God's exclusive mission to the Jewish people with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in AD 70.

Meanwhile, the king's banquet hall was not yet filled. His grace and generosity are still available for others. So, he turns his attention to a new group of people (which will include both Jews and Gentiles). The king tells his servants to go to into the roads and invite anyone they find ***"both bad and good,"*** Jesus says (v 10).

I'm reminded here of the many community Thanksgiving feasts that take place all across this country every year in shelters and rescue missions. While most of us are enjoying a lavish, intimate, and cozy feast with our closest friends and family, the good Samaritans who put on these community feasts are giving up their holiday time and serving anyone and everyone in need. I particularly remember Frieda Dice who every year serve at the community center.

Jesus said, ***“The tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you”*** (Matthew 21:31). And so finally the banquet hall was filled.

But the parable isn't over. On first hearing it, this last part sounds totally unfair! When the king came in to see his guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper wedding garment. Now it is not that this man was merely poor and being discriminated against for his lack of a fine garment. No, this man had apparently refused to put on the robe provided by the king for each of his guests. Remember, it was a last-minute invitation to this last group in the parable. The food was piping hot. They had no time to run home and get dressed up. Besides, it was the custom in that day for the very rich to provide even the proper clothing for a spectacular banquet. And so, this man's refusal was an insult to the king. It was as if this man were saying, "I'll do it my way!" But the king said, ***“Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?”*** (v 12).

And the man had nothing to say. There was no excuse. ***“That every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God”*** (Romans 3:19). We are reminded that God provides everything we need.

“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.”

Jesus is speaking in this parable not only to the religious leaders of Israel but also to you and me. For until heaven and earth pass away, not one thing will disappear from the Word of God or become irrelevant. And these things are written that we may have eternal life. Jesus is speaking to us. And rather than hearing this as dusty history about the Jewish people, we are to ask ourselves at every turn, “Is this me? Is it I, Lord?”

Are we the one who has been invited by the Lord to his eternal banquet but go to our fields instead? Are we the one who prefers our earthly business to eternal life in heaven?

Are we the one whose god is our stomach and whose mind is on earthly things? ***“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”*** (Colossians 3:2). ***“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”*** (Mt 6:21). ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”*** (Matthew 6:33).

Like the Jewish religious leaders to whom Jesus was speaking, it is easy for us to take comfort in our heritage, to hide behind our citizenship in a supposedly Christian nation. How many say, “Of course, I believe in God! Of course, I’m a Christian!” And yet the society we want so much to fit into keeps rejecting the King’s invitation and teaches us to do the same. Just think of the assault on Christ and his Word that is escalating in our land: legalized abortion, the breakup of marriage and the family, flaunted homosexuality, secularism. And the list goes on and on.

And even if we get past that, even if we're able to live in the world but not be of the world, even if we sit right here week after week, this parable still challenges us to ask ourselves, "Have I put on the wedding garment? Am I here on God's terms or my own? Am I seeking to have a share in God's eternal banquet in the way that he wants me to, by faith alone, solely on the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ, who died for my sins? Or am I seeking to wear my own clothes, to earn my way into the banquet, to be dressed in how nice a person I am or how hard I try or how well I keep the principles for Christian living?"

This is the question. And it is a life-and-death one, for the Lord will ultimately destroy those who reject his message. And what about those who seek to get into his kingdom on their own terms? He will throw them into everlasting darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There is only one way to be found at the end of the age, at the end of your life, and even today and every day. It is to be found in the banquet hall in the kingdom of heaven having heeded his invitation.

And it is to be found wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness, by virtue of believing in Jesus Christ and him crucified for your sins.

“He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,” the Scriptures say of the Lord (Isaiah 61:10). And all this God the Father offers to give us for the sake of his only Son, who gave his life so that his righteousness could be ours. All our materialism, our earthly-mindedness, our choosing the ways of this world rather than the kingdom of God—it's all paid for, covered up by the robe of Christ's righteousness, which he first gave to us in Holy Baptism.

And now today God's mercy continues. While it is still day, he continues urgently to invite us and all people into his banquet hall. Through the preaching and teaching of his Holy Word, by the mouths of his modern-day messengers, through the ministry of his Holy Church, he invites all to trust in him for salvation.

He invites us to experience already here on earth a foretaste of his eternal banquet in heaven, as we come each Lord's Day to the Lord's Table and sit at the wedding banquet of his Son. For Jesus is the heavenly Bridegroom, and the Church is the Bride of Christ. And what is life but a rehearsal for the never-ending feast of heaven?

This is the day the Lord has made! He has prepared a table for us! Today our Savior calls us to come to His banquet table.

Amen