

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 22:1–14

Sermon: You're Invited

God's invitation to his eternal banquet resonates loud and clear throughout the liturgical setting of this day. Our *Collect* acknowledges that "***You invite us to trust in You for our salvation,***" as the Scripture lessons reveal how that salvation resounds in an eschatological feast. Isaiah in our *Old Testament Reading* proclaims the consummation of history by comparing the judgment foretold in the previous chapter to the preparation made by the Lord of Hosts that brings to the table a feast of rich food filled with marrow and well-aged wines. At this feast, the shroud of death is removed, and in its place, is the Lord's salvation. An invitation to this event brings rejoicing rather than disgrace (Isaiah 25:6–9).

The *Epistle* continues the call to ***“rejoice in the Lord always”***

(Philippians 4:4) as those at the eternal banquet will surely do.

And now in our *Gospel text* we have Jesus’ parable about the gracious invitation of the king and the preoccupations of this world. The world’s rejection of the invitation brings God’s righteousness by way of judgment. But in contrast, the righteousness found in the king’s repeated invitation culminates with the gracious gift of the garment of salvation, which is provided for the chosen partakers of the banquet and brings peace in Christ’s forgiveness.

It’s the last week of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and he’s very preoccupied. The past three Sundays, we’ve heard Jesus tell parables about that one thing that to him is all-consuming: the kingdom of heaven. That continues today.

Jesus continues his preoccupation over the kingdom of heaven. Ultimately, that means our eternal rest, to which ***“the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing,”*** says the apostle Paul (Romans 8:18).

Yet heaven is the place we don't think about all that much, do we? We really don't want to contemplate a preoccupation outside of this world, and our preoccupation of this world is connected to our accomplishments, our desires, our motivations, our aspirations—to the extent that the kingdom of heaven is not really all that appealing. It'll be fine when I end this life. It'll be fine when I get there. It'll be a wonderful aftermath, a tasty dessert. Getting into the kingdom purely by the grace of God doesn't attract us that much. That's why we're saving it for later, because there's nothing else left to do once we die.

The kingdom of heaven simply isn't our focus. We're preoccupied elsewhere. But, of course, we won't be surprised to find that Jesus' preoccupation is far better than our own.

In the parable, Jesus identifies two types of unbelievers. 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. 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."

Jesus says that the kingdom is like a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. This is to be understood as God the Father and God the Son, the Christ. The king sends his servants out with the invitation once; nobody shows. A second time, and we find out why. One is more interested in his field, the other in his business. And still others become hostile to it. The invitation goes out to the called ones of Israel, and they don't want it. We might ask ourselves, "Why would anyone reject the free gift of salvation?"

Answer: they don't want it! Not on God's terms! Their own terms, sure. But not on God's terms!

And this is just like us. We are told from a young age that if we work hard enough, if we want it bad enough and the list goes on about how we can do it ourselves. But this doesn't work when it comes to salvation.

The first type of person who rejects the king's invitation is the one who rejects openly. Then there is the second type. We find him at the end of the parable. ***"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.”

At last, the multitudes are flocking to the wedding feast! The servants went out to the main roads and **“as many as you find”** came in and filled the wedding hall. Jesus now turns the emphasis to what they’re wearing, the garments. And notice there was one who, **“not having been garmented,”** is extremely conspicuous, stressing the point that the king observes something outrageous and insulting.

This is a slap in the face of the righteousness of the king. There’s a man not wearing the garment graciously provided for him. Did you get that, the garment was provide for him? He stands among the guests insisting that he can attend the banquet by his own merit, again, on his own terms. He refuses to be humbled by mercy, leaving him either naked or in a clown suit. He pretends.

He has pretended all along. He has never understood true freedom. And we are back to "he doesn't want it," aren't we?

Why? Because we are busy building our own kingdoms. We take care of and nurture them as if they will last forever. That's just like us! Tell me that you wake up each morning of your life and go about your work with the eternal kingdom of heaven in full view. The one into which we've been baptized. Instead, we say, "Wait a minute! I have things to do! I'm busy down here!" Yes, we are. And that's the point! The human preoccupation in this short-lived world shoves the coming forever kingdom aside because the human heart deems this world more worthy.

You see, grace is cheap. And so we treat the kingdom with, "I'll consider it when it comes." And all along it *has* already come by way of the cross and resurrection of Christ. We get to taste it! But how long after the chalice do we again leave the eternal?

Yet still notice what our heavenly Father is doing again and again while we grip things so tightly. And if they be taken away, then comes the "where are you God?" We don't realize that God is replacing this kingdom with the next. The one Jesus is preoccupied with. We are so far from contemplating "dying with Christ." This is because we are never finished with our own intentions.

That's why the sole comfort throughout this parable is the invitation, the mercy of God through the invitation: A king . . . sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast. *Again* he sent other servants, . . . "My oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. *Come* to the wedding feast." "*Go therefore* to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast *as many as you find.*"

We are the ones in the outlying areas. We are not in line at the box office wondering if the banquet is going to be sold out. But the king invites. He does it again and again. And the beauty is this: the peace of the Gospel is knowing he does it in spite of me. If he doesn't do it in spite of me, then there is no grace, no joy. Jesus says, ***"This is what the kingdom of heaven is like!"***

It is only there then that we can have the perspective of the coming kingdom—knowing that he sought me out. I get to go to the feast because he sought me out! And it is here. It is right now. He comes again and again and tells us to eat and drink of it ***"often in remembrance of me."*** He loves us that much. So, come at His invitation and receive the foretaste of the feast to come. Drink of the chalice, and leave here forgiven.

Amen