

## Sermon for Trinity 20 – Matthew 22:1-14

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

It was one of the strangest ways to decline a wedding invitation: “But [those who were invited] paid no attention [to the invitation] and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized [the king’s] servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.” Now if I’m unable to go to a wedding when invited, I usually just check the box “decline” or “regret.” That’s just me. But to each his own, I suppose.

Yet when our Lord teaches His disciples about the kingdom of heaven being compared to king who gave a wedding feast for his son, this is no ordinary wedding; this is no ordinary invitation. For this wedding is the telling of the Good News of Christ’s death and resurrection for us. Christ Himself is the food. He has redeemed us from the power of the devil, sin, and hell by His suffering and death. This is the invitation by which God has invited the whole world. He cleanses us by Baptism, clothes us with faith, comforts and confirms us with the Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood so that there is no lack. Everything is completely sufficient. The Gospel is satisfaction and joy extended to everyone.

Why? Because the slaughtered oxen and fattened calves are none other than God’s Gospel promises that feed and comfort our souls—yes, these are the promises that you can stake your life on: “The righteous shall live by faith.” “Come to me,” Christ says, “All you who are weary and heavy-laden; I will give you rest.” “I came not to call the righteous but sinners.” “He will not break the bruised reed, nor snuff the smoldering wick.” This is the very food that sustains us during difficult and miserable times.

Sadly, many reject this wedding feast. They pay no attention. They go off to their work. They go off to their hobbies. They speak spitefully and shamefully of God’s Word. The Jews were first to reject the wedding feast. But do these excuses still happen among Christians today? When we see God’s Word accompanied by cross, suffering, hardship, ridicule, and persecution, do we not want to give up? Who hasn’t feared the consequences of doing the right thing when making decisions? Who hasn’t tried to calculate the best path which stays in good standing—to attempt to have the best of both worlds?

God’s goodness and longsuffering is seen in this: That He continues to send out His invitation. To the chosen city and nation we would have expected to be worthy, that city lays desolate. Rather, to those of us who have been down the roads of darkness and despair, who have traveled the paths of hurting ourselves and others through sin, from the world’s highways, we are invited. Both Jews and Gentiles, we are invited. Indeed, many are called...

...But few are chosen. That’s the main point of these parables. “Many are called, but few are chosen.” If we’re honest with ourselves, there is no glory in us. On the

contrary, just weakness. We are unworthy. Sorrow. Sadness. All kinds of suffering. These are our constant companions. We live in a fallen world even as we ourselves have fallen. Still, we fill the wedding hall.

There is a man at the feast who doesn't wear the wedding garment. He is impenitent. He has hardened his heart. He is silent in hypocrisy. He will not repent. He will not turn from his sin and place it at Jesus' feet to be washed away. He holds fast to false doctrine. He receives what he already has chosen: hands cuffed together, holding onto self-made justifications and excuses. Feet bound, unwilling to walk God's path of righteousness and life. With no trust in the wedding garment of Baptism and the King who gave it, where else can he be but where there is darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth? He remains in his old rags and tatters of worldly opinions, unbelief, and security in knowing what he thinks is right; that he did it his way...

Don't be that guy. We must not look at ourselves according to our first birth from Adam, but as we are called by Christ and baptized into His name. We are called Christians. "The washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" cleanses us every day, until the day when we need cleansing no more. "I am baptized!" This is a present reality for every one of us. It is the wedding garment of repentance and faith. It is a garment, that, while very out of style by this culture's standards, nonetheless it will never fade; it will never unravel.

As baptized sons and daughters of the King, we should not be frightened, even if we feel completely unworthy and unclean. We should not forget our consolation and trust in Christ. It's as if He says to us, "Even though you are full of sin, death, and condemnation, yet you have in Baptism My righteousness and life, which I have applied and given to you. You are unclean and filthy, yet you have here the washing of Baptism and My Word, through which I wash you and pronounce you clean and will always cleanse you forever and ever, until you stand completely clean and pure before Me and all creation."

We are delivered from hopelessness, sorrow, depression, sin, eternal death, and Satan's power. We boast not only in what Christ did for us. We boast not only in what He gave for us, but we also boast that He is our own. His grace and godliness belong to us. His life over shadows our death. As a spark is extinguished by the ocean, so is our death covered over by Christ's resurrection and life. Do we want to make up for our past? Do we want to atone for our sins? God has another idea. Our God has compassion on us and abundantly pardons. "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠