

Matthew 22:1–14

¹Jesus spoke to them again in parables. He said, ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding banquet, but they did not want to come. ⁴ “Then he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!’ ⁵ “But those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized the king’s servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ As a result, the king was very angry. He sent his army and killed those murderers and burned their town. ⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ So go to the main crossroads and invite as many as you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰ Those servants went out to the roads and gathered together everyone they found, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

“Accept God’s Divine Wedding Invitation”

1. You are invited by the King himself
2. Accept the invitation with joy
3. The best wedding gown is provided for you

Sermon for Pentecost 21, October 25, 2020, St. Paul’s Green Garden

Theme: “Accept the Divine Wedding Invitation”

In the name of Jesus, my dear fellow redeemed,

In Old Testament times as well as at Jesus’ time the common Israelite family experienced hard physical labor involving taking care of livestock such as sheep, cattle and goats. Their hard work also involved them in planting fields, olive groves, and vineyards as well as harvesting varieties of grain, grapes, figs, olives and probably other types of crops as well. Then the harvest had to be properly processed and stored. Grapes were crushed, the juice collected and made into wine. Figs likely were eaten fresh and then dried for storage. Olives were probably pressed and the oil collected and stored. The name of the garden where Jesus prayed on Maundy Thursday evening, Gethesemane, means “Olive Press.” One thing we hear little about among the common people was any kind of entertainment. We hear of it among kings and perhaps those who were wealthy, but most people had to work hard and had little time or resources for entertainment.

Page 2 So when the families of a young man and woman arranged a marriage, the couple's wedding was an occasion for feasting and celebration. Often wedding celebrations could last several days and among those who could afford it, a week or more. And because weddings were important to family and friends if you received an invitation to a wedding, unless you had a good excuse you would accept such an invitation as a chance to gather with family and friends. And because weddings were important as times of celebration and joy, Jesus tells a parable about a wedding that really urges us to "Accept God's Divine Wedding Invitation." 1. You are invited by the King himself 2. Accept this invitation with joy 3. The best wedding gown is provided for you.

When you receive a wedding invitation, you usually know who is sending it. You may look at the return address, or you may already know the invitation is coming soon and you are watching for it. So when God gives us his divine wedding invitation, you know who he is. He is your gracious heavenly Father who loves you and wants to share his joy and happiness with you. How amazing! What's more you know who your heavenly Father is because he first invited you into his family when he called you to believe in him at your baptism.

There was nothing in you or me that would cause God to call us to be his children. In fact everything in us hated God when we were born. So if God had sent us to hell we would have deserved it. But our God has mercy. He saw our sinful condition and had mercy on us. He called us at our baptism, washed us clean by the death and resurrection of Jesus. At your baptism your Lord called you to be his child with no strings attached. And by the fact that he called you into his family and named you his child, this means that he has also invited you to every family festivity, including to his great wedding feast. **"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son."** This parable follows on the one we heard last Sunday. In that parable the landowner had leased out his vineyards to farmers who did not want to hand over the harvest they owed the landowner. When he sent servants they mistreated and killed them. Finally, when he sent his son to receive payment of the harvest they killed the heir and took his inheritance. In that parable the Son died. But here he is again and the king is preparing a wedding banquet for him. Think about it! The Son is killed, pointing to Good Friday. But here he is again. He is alive again, pointing us to Easter. And yet the unbelieving Jews, the Pharisees and teachers of the law turned up their noses at the king's gracious invitation.

For you and me, we need to remember also that our God invites us to his feast of the Lord's Supper. Some may feel that they have sinned too much, or that God cannot stand to look at them because of their foul sins. Friend, come to the Lord's Table with a repentant heart, receive his forgiveness AND the assurance that he has forgiven you **all** your sins by receiving his body and blood.

This is what it means to accept the King's divine invitation. You are a member of his family. Accept his invitation to the wedding banquet of his son. When you accept it, you show your faith that you have a permanent seat at his table. He wants you to enjoy

page 2 blessings of being a member of the Holy Christian Church. We should understand that this parable is giving us a picture of the marriage feast of Christ and his bride the Church. Your Lord invites you to the everlasting joy of this blessed feast. So why would you want to do anything but accept the king's invitation with joy. —

But in Jesus' parable we see that there are those who treat this invitation with contempt. **“Then he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. ... Come to the wedding banquet!’ ‘But those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own farm, another to his business. The rest seized the king’s servants, mistreated them, and killed them.”** This is the reaction of people who hate God. Why do people hate God? Because many believe that all God wants to do is condemn them to hell and they don't know what to do about it? They feel guilt and want to deny it, OR they hate God because he tells everyone that the only way to salvation is to trust in Jesus' perfect life, death and resurrection as payment for all our sins.

Jesus told this parable to wake up the spiritually dead Pharisees and teachers of the law. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus and his invitation, because yes, they hated God. We saw in Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants last Sunday that those religious leaders of the Jews KNEW Jesus was talking about them. Yet they refused to repent. The invitation that God intended for them to receive with joy, and to teach others to receive it in the joy of faith, they treated with contempt. Earthly things, their own honor in front of others, climbing the ladder of social status, being the most respected Pharisee or teacher, were far more important to them than repenting of their sins and receiving the King's invitation with joy.

Do we see this attitude in ourselves? Do we stubbornly refuse to repent of our sins? Do we dig in our heels when someone confronts us with our sins? Christians who are very sincere in their love for God can still fall away. I have seen it happen and it is not only sad that a dear child of God abandons his family of believers, in favor of the pleasures the sinful nature seeks; it is distressing for the group of Christians whom the unfaithful person leaves behind. It distresses us because we know that the person who refuses Christ's invitation is headed only for eternal damnation. And sometimes, despite our most sincere efforts to warn the person who rejected the invitation, they simply turn a deaf ear to our pleas.

Yet our Lord does not want us to allow such losses to diminish our own joy in receiving his invitation. We have joy in receiving the King's invitation because we know we do not deserve to receive it. It comes to us by God's grace. We take joy in the King's invitation because we know we are sinners who violate God's holy will every day. Yet he sent his Son to redeem us, to wipe away our sins because he wants to extend his invitation to us, to come to his wedding banquet. What joy we have, knowing we don't deserve it, yet he invites us. It's like the kid who knows that one of the kids at school is having a big birthday party, and he said something very unkind to the kid who was having the birthday. So he never expected to get an invitation to the other child's

Page 4 birthday party. But to his surprise he gets an invitation he never expected. Would you not receive that invitation with joy? So when you get the invitation, the first question on some people's minds is, "What do I wear?"

Since we have received the king's invitation, that should be on our minds also. In our time in history, wedding guests, of course, wear what they have in their own closet, or some may go out and purchase a new set of clothes for the occasion. When we accept our King's invitation to his heavenly wedding feast, what does he want us to wear? Well, the king had ordered his servants to go out to the highways and crossroads and issue the invitation to come to his wedding banquet. So the servants did this, and we are told they invited everyone they could find both good and bad. By this Jesus may mean the invitation was extended to honest, hard working farmers and their families, but also to thieves, tax collectors and prostitutes.

We are not sure of the custom, but it may be that at some weddings, kings or other wealthy people may actually have provided wedding garments for the guests. If this was a custom, perhaps it was done so nobody would appear to be dressed better than anyone else. In any case Jesus uses this idea in his parable to prove his point. Finally the banquet hall was filled with guests and the king went into the hall to see the guests he saw one many who was not wearing a wedding garment. **"He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?' The man was speechless."** Now the King had provided wedding clothes for all the guests, so when he saw one man not wearing the garment he gave him to wear, it was reasonable of the king to ask how he was able to enter the banquet hall without the provided garment. But the man had nothing to say. What could he say? He had snubbed the gracious gift of the King. He did not deserve to be a guest so the king had him thrown outside.

What was Jesus meaning here? God's invitation comes to us by his grace because we do not deserve to receive it. The only way we can enter by his grace is to wear the wedding garments that Jesus gives us—that is, the garments of his righteousness, holiness and purity purchased for us on the cross and sealed to us by his resurrection. In one of our hymns we sing, **"Jesus, your blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress."** We dare not believe or even attempt to offer God any of our own works in payment for our sins. We will never be able to do so, and we will find ourselves in the same situation as this man, being thrown out of the banquet hall into the darkness of a never-ending hell.

But you see, that does not need to happen. We can come before our Lord in humility, accept his merciful forgiveness, wear the garment of Jesus' righteousness and attend our Lord's wedding banquet with joy. Yes, there will be many who will scoff and make fun of our child-like trust in Jesus and his holiness. But we have God's promises and the certainty the Holy Spirit gives us in God's Word. Jesus' warning in this parable is firm, yet it reminds us that there is room at the wedding banquet for everyone, yes, for sinners like you and me. Continue to cling to and trust in Jesus and his merciful forgiveness, for in him we are invited to the heavenly wedding banquet. Amen.