

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

Don't Miss the Party!

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

If you have ever put on a party for a big occasion, you know that it is a lot of work. There is a lot of planning that needs to be done. You have to think about the location, the menu, the activities, the decorations, the guest list, and on and on. Imagine if you put in all that time preparing a great party and then, on the day event, none of your guests show up. You would be devastated. This is some of the emotion that Jesus must have experienced as he was speaking with members of the Sanhedrin in our Gospel reading today. His message to them was clear: Don't miss the party! And that same message applies to us today, as well.

Jesus spoke this parable around the same time as he spoke the other parables we have read the past few Sundays. It was Holy Week—the final days before Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. The religious leaders were putting forth and all out effort to

discredit Jesus and stop him from gaining an even larger following. Jesus spoke to these religious leaders in parables to point out their hypocrisy and foolishness in light of God's truth. This is certainly true of this parable of the wedding feast, which we see today.

Jesus said that that kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. You have to understand that this was much more than what we usually think of as a wedding reception. This was more than chicken and tips at the Bil-Mar. This king was putting on a feast that would involve meal after meal for a full week. He had pulled out all the stops—killing the best oxen and the fattened calf. All that was left now was for the guests to show up and enjoy the party. But this is where the parable takes a strange turn. You would think that guests would be thrilled to be heading to the king's palace for such a feast. But when the servants go out with the word that the banquet is ready, the guests refused to come. Even when the king sends a second round of messengers, the people still stay away.

We see that there are two reasons why the people are not coming to the feast. Some of the people just don't care. They think they have better things to do. As Jesus said, *"They paid no attention and went off—one to his field and another to his business."* The second group of people who will not come are much more forceful in their refusal of the invitation. They hate the king. They want nothing to do with his celebration. They go so far as to take the king's messengers and kill them. This is shocking behavior. Who would do such a thing? A polite, "No thanks" would be enough, wouldn't it?

But Jesus needed this story to take a shocking twist, because it was explaining a shocking spiritual reality that existed in the world at that time. God had sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to save the world. In just a few days, Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection would put the finishing touches on God's plan of salvation. Through the sacrifice of his one and only Son, God had prepared a feast of salvation for his people. It was a feast of forgiveness, peace and eternal life. God's own people—the nation of Israel—had a special invitation. God had told them about this feast through his prophets—such as we saw in our reading from Isaiah. They had known for centuries that a Messiah would be coming to earth to prepare a heavenly banquet of salvation. And, yet, when the time came and the messengers went out (Jesus himself being one of those messengers), most of the people for whom this banquet had been prepared rejected the invitation. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus as their Savior. Some of them were simply apathetic towards Jesus. Others, like the members of the Sanhedrin, actually wanted to take the next step as we see in the parable—they

wanted to kill the Messenger. In so doing, they were sealing their own fate. Just as the king in the parable sent out his army to destroy those who had murdered his servants, God's judgment would also come to those who had rejected and mistreated his Son.

But that isn't us, is it? We would never turn away God's invitation to the feast of salvation. Or would we? Remember, not everyone in the parable who rejected the king's invitation did so out of absolute hatred for the king. Some were simply indifferent. Is there a possibility of us treating God's Word and his gospel promises with a similar kind of indifference? I think there is. Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual problems in our midst today is that of apathy. God prepares his rich banquet of salvation for us, invites us through the Word and the Sacrament, and we respond with, "Whatever. I don't care." There are more important things to worry about. We have to think about our finances and our families. But, perhaps what we are unaware of, is that when we treat God's message of salvation with such apathy, we run the risk of missing out on the heavenly party altogether.

Thank God he doesn't give up on us. Jesus points out the persistence of God's love as he continues the parable. After the first round of invitations was rejected, the king doesn't give up. He sends out more messengers to take invitations out to the street corners and invite anyone who will listen to the feast. Many respond to this set of invitations. There are so many that respond that the king's banquet is completely full. But then another problem arises. Not everyone at the banquet is properly dressed. The king notices at least one man who is not wearing his wedding clothes. When the king asks the man why he is not properly dressed, the man has no response. So the king throws the man outside. He, along with anyone else who is not wearing the right clothing, is also going to miss the party.

Of course, Jesus wasn't teaching the members of the Sanhedrin here the importance of always dressing your best. The picture here is still of the banquet of salvation. And the point is, if you are going to take part in this feast, you have to be properly dressed. What is the proper spiritual outfit to wear if you want to enjoy the party of salvation? Jesus gives us this answer when he continues by saying, "*For many are invited, but few are chosen.*" Here, Jesus speaks of God's elect—those whom God has chosen from all eternity to be his own. And who are the elect? They are those who trust in Jesus Christ and him alone for their salvation. They are the ones who are clothed not with their own good works, but rather with the robe of Christ's righteousness. That is what it takes to enjoy the feast of salvation.

Are you wearing the right clothing for this party? Wearing the right clothing means first of all despairing of your ability to stand before God dressed in your own righteousness. It's just not possible. Even if you devote your life to good causes and try to live every day in the best way you know how—when you stand before God, you are still covered in sin. The only way you can enter the party is by covering yourself with the perfection of Christ. By faith in Jesus as your Savior, you can stand before God without fear. As we just sang in the hymn of the day—“*Jesus, your blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.*” Covered over with Christ's perfection, we can look forward to enjoying the wonderful banquet of heaven, which God has prepared for us.

This is good news. This is better than knowing you have been invited to some prestigious party here on earth. You have been invited to feast in the mansions of heaven! Don't miss out on the party. Don't treat this invitation as though it is no big deal. Don't allow a day to go by without thanking God for the love he showed in securing your eternal salvation. Make sure you are wearing the right clothes for the party by going to God's Word and the Sacrament often for the strengthening of your faith. And then don't be satisfied going to the party alone. Extend the invitation to others as well that they may know God's love and look forward to spending an eternity at the great heavenly feast. This is something you don't want to miss. And by God's grace, you won't. **Amen.**

Sermon No. 202
October 5, 2008
Pastor Steven Hahm
pastorhahm@hotmail.com
920.684.0101