

October 15, 2017

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Wearing Your Best”

Matthew 22:1-14

Scary stuff from the mouth of Jesus! We’ve got the king sending troops and burning down a city and then we’ve got a guy being bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! God, the king, seems like a pretty angry, nasty guy.

Well, not really. If you look at the typical nature of the king in Jesus’ parable, He wants to give. He wants to throw a wonderful wedding feast with oxen, fat calves, wine and celebration. He wants everybody to have the best of times. He wants to do good by those who are invited. And even when those invited refuse the invitation, the king simply sends more messengers to invite them again. It’s not until the invitees are standing in stubborn opposition to the king, even in outright rebellion, that the king’s anger is kindled and the invited are brought to a terrible end.

And you and I can really move beyond that part of the parable pretty quickly because those invited first would be Israel, the Jews who for centuries rebuffed the prophets of God calling people to faith and who in our Gospel reading are in the midst of refusing God’s Christ who stands before them. The burning of their city literally took place forty years later in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70 AD.

You and I live in the wonderful Gospel message as those who the king’s servants later gathered from the roads and byways, both bad and good, who were invited and gladly accepted the invitation. We have been counted worthy, not because we are worthy, but only because we have been made so by the king’s gracious invitation.

You see, the kind of goofy thing in this parable is that the king’s son for whom this wedding banquet is held isn’t Jesus. Jesus is more properly understood as the invitation of the king. Jesus is who the Jews refused, rejected and crucified. Yet because the sins of the world went with Him to the grave and He rose to eternal life without those sins, the doors of the heavenly wedding feast now stand open to us. By the Gospel Word of Christ, we unworthy sinners stand forgiven and invited into the presence of God forever. By Spirit-given faith in this Word of grace, we stand declared worthy by virtue of our Holy Baptism into Christ Jesus and have a place in the banquet, in the eternal kingdom of God.

But this is where we might tend to misunderstand, because so often in the Bible the wedding feast is the picture of where we are in eternity after Jesus has returned for judgment on the last day. And it’s true, our eternity in God’s presence has yet to come to complete fulfillment. But it is also true that by virtue of that same Holy Baptism in which we stand, eternal life in Christ is our present possession. As you live and breathe today you are in the kingdom, inside the wedding banquet.

So this last part of the parable should make us ponder—what kind of clothes are we wearing...wearing today?

Yes, this is scary stuff from the mouth of Jesus. You see, the wedding garment one is expected to wear in the feast of the king is simply this: your best. Whatever your best outfit is, this is how you honor the king who has extended his invitation to you.

This last guy in the parable? He has just wandered in wearing some trashed, dirty outfit. He has responded to the invitation, yes. But he esteems the invitation and the feast not at all! And

the king even addresses this guy as “friend” in asking him about this rudeness, but Jesus says “*And he was speechless.*” And I’m really tempted to read this that the guy wasn’t speechless with fear, but that he was more like “meh,” like he simply didn’t care about the king, the son, the wedding or the feast.

And this is the warning to us. We simply cannot take the message of Jesus for granted. We are possessors of the kingdom this very day, yes. But if we do not appreciate the gift of forgiveness, do not esteem the Lord Jesus who suffered and died to bring us in, if we do not daily strive to wear the best life we can for our gracious God as we sojourn in faith through this fallen world, we’re showing up to the feast wearing trash.

500 years ago, Martin Luther started the Reformation because all people had was fear of God. The Gospel had been hidden, so wrath and punishment was all people expected from God. Today I fear the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction. People think that because Jesus had died and risen, the Gospel gift is something cheap; that it doesn’t command a life devoted to God and a loving zeal to daily live in Christ Jesus; live the righteousness with which He had adorned us.

I mean, think about it—how many Christians are real quick to say, “I know what the Bible says, but I think...such and such”? How many of us tolerate or even practice behaviors that the sinful culture around us deems acceptable, yet God clearly calls sinful, but we overrule God as if He is the inconsequential one and the culture is the authority? How many of us do secret sexual sin, or incessant gossip, or continual greed, or whatever evil, but we think we are managing it okay in our life because things are more or less going along fine?

Here is the wakeup call of the parable: In all of this you are in the banquet of God and none of this is hidden. The king, God almighty, is right here with you and He sees the garment with which you are adorning yourself. (Pause) Yes, this is very scary stuff from the mouth of Jesus.

But it is from the mouth of Jesus, the one who has been sent by the God who wishes everybody to have the best of times in His wedding feast. It is from the mouth of Jesus, who died and rose so that you would be clothed with the robe of His righteousness that covers all your sin. It is from the mouth of Jesus as an invitation to you to faithfully turn from your sin and receive the forgiveness and salvation He offers.

These are scary words from the mouth of Jesus because I think if anyone properly hears them, he or she hears the king speaking directly to them in the midst of their sin, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?”

Do not be speechless people. Do not stand in your slimy rags of sin nonchalantly responding, “meh”. Be ever opening your mouth to Christ the king saying, “Please forgive me.” Appeal to your Holy Baptism into Christ to wash your robes of iniquity. Drop to your knees and beg Christ’s pardon and receive His body and blood and the clothing of forgiveness and righteousness therein.

The right response to the king is repentance, because His nature is to forgive and grant great blessing. But apathetic silence, a willingness to walk around in His wedding feast contentedly clothed in your sins, will bring His wrath.

Very scary words from Jesus indeed. But they are for our good. The crucified and risen Jesus speaks them to us across time reminding us of what He has done for us; reminding us how good our king is to us. He warns us to speak up and repent, and to each day wake up baptized into the wedding banquet and put on our best garment, which is, in fact, Christ the crucified.

Amen.