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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

October 22, 2023

Text: Matthew 22:1–14

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Christian Church is described in a number of ways in the Bible. For instance, the Church is the household of faith in Galatians 6:10 but then Ephesians 2:19 says the Church is the household of God. The Lord Jesus says the Church, the kingdom of God, here on earth is like a pearl of great price – truly valuable. Well, we could go on. In today’s gospel reading, we see that the Church is compared to a royal wedding feast. “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 feast...” (vs. 2–3). God the Father is the king who prepares a wedding feast for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His beloved bride, the holy Christian Church made up of believers from all human history. This is the marriage feast of all marriage feasts. It’s royal and divine.

I want you to imagine the splendor of such an occasion? No expense is spared. The food and drink are the finest. The music and décor are exquisite. The guest list is extensive. Dear saints, let your imagination enjoy the splendor. For this is God’s kingdom of grace and mercy established through the gospel of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This gospel of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners like you and me is the joy of heaven and earth. “This royal wedding is Christ’s gracious kingdom, where there is sumptuous food and drink, comforting proclamation, genuine joy, and everlasting bliss; where the poor sinner finds redemption from death, where the sorrowful are comforted, and there are glad tidings, singing, praising, and giving of thanks” (Luther, p. 108).

The Father's invitation to the wedding feast goes forth from Christ's Church through her ministry day after day, year after year. Let us enter and rejoice.

But vs. 3 gives a warning, however, "but they would not come." The invitation was ignored. The reasons were plausible According to vs. 5, some went to work on the farm. Others asked to be excused to take care of other forms of business. Other simply grew tired of the invitations altogether and had the messengers shamefully treated and killed (vs. 6). To be sure, Jesus is describing the sad history of Old Testament Israel. By and large, God's ancient people rejected the invitations more often than not.

But this parable isn't simply about the past. It applies today too. Many still say no to God's invitation to come to His Son's wedding feast. The excuses are pretty much the same. Too busy, there's not enough time. So many priorities need attention. Isn't an all-around "busyness" a common malady afflicting us all?! The result, however, is the same: please have me excused from the feast that is offered week after week in Christ's churches. But the excuses ring hollow compared to the magnitude of the feast offered.

The king responds to the rejection with anger. According to vs. 7, the troops are sent in, the murderers destroyed, and the city is burned. For Jesus' original audience – the scribes, Pharisees, and elders of Israel – this parable is both a historical commentary on Israel's past and a prophetic warning of things to come. In 70 A.D., Jerusalem was destroyed. After a bitter, agonizing, Roman soldiers eventually entered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple and everyone in it. The Jewish leaders never came to the wedding feast of salvation offered by Jesus. And God judged their unbelief. Sadly, to this is very day the Jewish people by and large reject their God and Savior; they refuse to confess Jesus is Lord and enter His Church in true faith through Christ's gospel.

It's here that we 21st century Christians need to pay attention. The rejection of the Father's invitation to the wedding feast results in God's wrath. Despising God's Word and the salvation Christ gives is a damnable sin even if it

appears to go unpunished for a while. Too easily we allow the things of this world, the cares of this life, and the desires for earthly comforts to distract us from the true and eternal joy that God the Father wants to give to us. The reasons given for not receiving the gospel in preached words and sacraments sound so reasonable. Life is busy; bills must be paid; people must be tended to. Yes. All of that is true. And yet, Jesus taught us that our Father in heaven knows we need these things and promises to provide them. But the Father knows we need the eternal things – Christ, His kingdom, and His righteousness. He bids us to seek them first.

Saints of God, heed the call to come to the wedding feast. The New Testament provides many, many warnings about neglecting God's Word, the public worship of the Church, and living daily in repentance and faith. The Lord Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

In today's parable, servants were sent out even after the king destroyed the city of the murderers (vs. 7). This time they are sent out into every nook and cranny. Bring them all into my Son's wedding feast for the joy of my Son's wedding will be shared with everyone. This is the description of the Church's ministry since the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus to the Father's right hand. This is our time to call people into the wedding celebration, to bring our kids and grandkids to the Sunday divine service, to tell our friends, neighbors, and strangers about Jesus. Remember, the Church and life in Christ is described as a wedding feast, not a quick fast-food meal hastily prepared and consumed as we quickly move on to the next task at hand. The Christian faith is life. We are a resurrection people. Our God raises the dead. Forgives sinners. Heals broken hearts. Changes sinful lives and gives joy unspeakable and filled with divine glory!!

But the parable contains a second warning which we who confess faith in Jesus must heed. For the king came to the filled wedding hall and found a man "who had no wedding garment" (vs. 11). You see, not only does God the

Father provide the richest food, He provides the best clothing too. In order to understand the warning better, we first need to know these gifts of feasting and splendid clothing describe the beauty of Christ's Gospel and His Sacraments. The most immediate connections are Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. For in baptism, we are clothed with the righteous robe of Christ Jesus Himself! God the Father has already given you your wedding garment, Christ Himself and all His divine righteousness and majesty. And in Holy Communion, we feast on the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He fills the heavens and rules over all things for the good of His Church. As the Church, the bride of Christ, we feast together in royal clothes on holy things that have no other comparison.

This divine magnificence, however, really describes everything in Christ Church. God's Word is that "rich food" given to us freely as Isaiah described in today's Old Testament reading (Is. 55). And through God's Word, we learn about God's higher ways and thoughts. In Word and sermon, we come to know the mind of God who seeks to pardon and show compassion. And the apostle Paul, in the epistle reading from Ephesians 5, described the worship life of the Church as God's people being continually filled with the Holy Spirit as they address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We sing and make melody to the Lord with all our hearts as we give thanks to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus. These are God's gifts which we receive with joy and thanksgiving.

But a man refused the Father's gift of a new wedding garment. The audacity of this man to go to the feast in common, everyday work clothes rather than the wedding garments is unthinkable. Pure and simple, this verse describes a willful rejection of Christ, His Word, Sacraments, worship, and life. Coming to the feast in our own sin-stained clothes will never do. Those must be thrown away and replaced with clothing the Father provides. Through Christ Jesus, we have pure and spotless garments of righteousness fashioned for us on Good Friday and Easter. Christ's robe of righteousness is the greatest, most valuable gift we possess. Never take it off; wear it always.

According to vs. 13, the one who refused the Father's wedding garment is bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a warning to us. We must not despise the Father's gifts or His invitation to feast on His good and wholesome food. The Lord is patient not wanting any to perish but that all should reach repentance (II Pet. 3:9). And yet, today is the day of salvation. We must take care lest any of us develop an unbelieving heart that leads us away from the living God (Heb. 3:12–13). Encourage one another through God's Word and love. In repentance and faith in Christ, receive the Father's gifts. The satisfaction and joy they give can never be surpassed by anything this world has to offer.

Come, this is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice in His salvation. Let us come to the wedding and not despise the invitation. Then let us also apply ourselves, that each one performs what is his duty to do. If we do that, we shall be of good cheer. If we suffer for faithfulness to God's Word and name, it's all to the good. Our Lord's joyous invitation compels us all the more to hear and learn God's Word gladly, to feed our souls daily at this divine banquet, so that we do not disdain the Lord's invitation. The good work our Lord has begun in us He will bring to its joyous completion. May our dear Lord grant us His Holy Spirit that we may learn to cling tightly and joyously to these things, truly believe, lead a Christian life, and ever be found wearing the proper wedding garment (paraphrase of Luther, p. 116).

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.