

First Friends Church

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Oh, what to wear?

Matthew 22:1-14

### **Matthew 22:1-14**

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Message: Oh, what to wear?

Many years ago when I was teaching the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school aka First Day class we would have a time of music. B.G. Perriquay, who sang in our choir would come and spend about 10 to 15 minutes teaching us songs and hymns. I enjoyed those musical moments in our classroom and it was always good when we sang a hymn that I already knew or that I really liked. There were of course favorite songs that the children would request. One of the more requested songs was called the wedding Banquet. I think they requested this because they always turned the words of the refrain around. The verses told of the story much like the scripture that George read earlier. There was a certain man, who lived on a fine estate and held a great banquet to which he issued invitations far and wide and when the meal was ready each of them replied. ...."I cannot come; I cannot come to the banquet. Don't trouble me now. I have married a wife; I have bought me a cow. I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum. Pray hold me excused I cannot come." And then each verse of the song goes along with our scripture and ends with the refrain. But the kids would changed the words to "I cannot come, I cannot come to the banquet. Don't trouble me now. I have married a cow; I have bought me a wife. I have fields and corn-mitments that cost a pretty sum. Pray hold me excused I cannot come." It was a lot of fun. But most importantly through our exaggeration and messing with the words we remembered the story. I know a lot of musicians that say they have learned a lot of scripture because they have sang the psalm or the words of the scripture in a hymn.

However, our song was from the parable of the great banquet, found in Luke and not the parable of the Wedding Feast from Matthew. While there are some parallels there are some very distinct differences. While both parables are allegories referring to what heaven is like, in the Luke passage the master gets angry and calls his servants to go to the town and get the blind, the lame, and the poor to fill the banquet hall. And when the hall was still not filled to capacity he sends his servants again to search everywhere, to bring all that will come. Because the master is preparing a great feast, a banquet for that great day when the banquet hall is full and wants you to be ready when you get the summons to come to the banquet. But in Matthew the story doesn't end there and it becomes obvious that this parable is more than just a story about a king and a banquet.

Jesus often taught in Parables, The Greek word for parable literally means to set alongside. A fictional earthly story is set alongside a heavenly truth to help convey its meaning. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the people in parables He said,

*“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”* (**Matt. 13:11-12**)

Whenever I read a parable I am reminded of a conversation with a Friend, who said if Jesus wanted us to understand everything right now, he wouldn't have spoken in parables! So, it would seem that a parable was meant to accomplish two things: 1) to instruct His followers, and 2) to confuse everyone else. What seem to be conflicting objectives can both be accomplished because it's the Holy Spirit who gives us the understanding we need. Without the Holy Spirit, no one can comprehend the things of God. Paul put it this way;

*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (**1 Cor. 2:14**)

So why, was Jesus was teaching this particular parable?

In the previous chapter we find Jesus teaching in the temple where he is confronted by the religious leaders, who demand to know by what authority he is teaching and doing all the things that he is doing. It is here that Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the leaders, saying, and “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him. Jesus actually tells three parables, all concerning the religious leaders' rejection of God's invitation.

So, the king in this parable is to remind us of God, and the son is Jesus. The messengers that were sent forth are the OT prophets and John the Baptist. The people who rejected the invitation were the religious leaders, and the others that

were allowed to enter the feast were society's outcasts – the tax collectors, prostitutes, gentiles, and others outside of the religious circle.

Back in Jesus' day, an invitation from a king was a great honor. The custom was to send two invitations: the first was to tell everyone that the event was being planned, similar to our save the date cards for weddings today. And the second invitation was to tell everyone that everything was ready and about to begin. The invitation here is the second invitation. They had already received the first invitation and had indicated that they would attend.

When the second invitation was extended, the people that had accepted the first invitation refused to attend. This was more than just being discourteous – it was considered outright rebellion. The king was patient, however, and decided to send a third invitation. The messengers received a variety of responses to this invitation. Some just neglected to come. Others said that they were too busy with their business affairs, and some went to the extent of persecuting and even killing the messengers.

There are a few parts to this parable that strike me as important to remember.

There are a lot of people in our nation today that are just too busy to worry about their spiritual needs. Many are just too busy to think about their relationship with God. In the book of James, we are warned that our lives are like a vapor, present for a little while, but soon gone. We all need to take the time to deal with our spiritual needs, because tomorrow is not guaranteed. So we need to be like those messengers and let others know that they are welcome to come to the party. It's still happening, and the spirit is still sending out invitations.

Another important part of this parable is to recognize that everyone is invited to enter the banquet provided in this king's realm. The invitation went out to the good and the bad. The religious leaders were invited, but so were the tax collectors, prostitutes, and gentiles. It didn't matter then and it doesn't matter now who you are, what you have done, or where you come from, you are invited to have a relationship with God. God does not discriminate according to race, gender, social standing, or nationality. God doesn't care if you have tattoos, what you look like or how much money you make. No one is excluded. God invites everyone and we must be careful not to put up walls or set rules that would prevent anyone from having a relationship with the Spirit of the living God.

And we also have a responsibility and a need to respond to the spirits promptings and invitation on God's terms, not our own. Everyone was invited, but in order to be admitted, they had to choose to put on the wedding garment that was provided by the king. The wedding garment represents the righteousness of Christ. If we try to enter God's banquet wearing our own righteousness we will be rejected. The Bible says that our righteousness is like filthy rags in God's sight, but it goes on to say the following in Isaiah 61: I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

So what do you wear when you attend a wedding banquet given by the King? And where would the guest have obtained a wedding robe?

And what about this unfortunate fellow without the wedding garment? How fair is it for him to be thrown out? After all, this poor guy was dragged in off the street by the king's men, and because he wasn't wearing a wedding garment, he was chained up, hand and feet, and thrown back out onto the street. That just doesn't sound very just, does it? Not sure I like this! Oh, yeah, before I get to wound up I need to remember this is a parable. And parables have their own special form. .

But the parable is talking about God's kingdom not ours. So what is it? What's the difference between those who were not worthy and those who were?

There's only one thing that distinguishes the first-invited guests from the second-invited guests. Presence! The second group showed up while the first on didn't. That's the only difference. Show up, and be present, that's a lot easier said than done. To be present is difficult work. Think how difficult it is to be present to another person.

- It means putting the other person first..
- It means seeing them for who they are and not who we want them to be or think they should be.
- It means being vulnerable of entrusting and sharing our life with each other.
- It means really listening to what they say and not just what we hear or want to hear.

- It means letting go of our own agendas, distractions, fears, and prejudices.
- It means bringing and offering all that we are and all that we have.

If we're not doing that with others we're probably not doing it with God. Instead, we too often go our separate ways, to our homes and businesses. We're too busy, too tired, too distracted. There's work to be done and money to be made. We make light of the other's life and what is being offered. If we don't earn it or work for it we assume it has no value. We're convinced we have better things to do and better places to be. That's what the first-invited group did.

To show up and be present with your whole being is to be worthy before God. It's that simple and it's that difficult. There is no prerequisite to entering the banquet. We show up, be present, and discover for ourselves the worthiness God has always known about us. That's when our lives begin to change.

But what about the guy who showed up without a wedding robe? This is about more than just a dress code violation. Something else was missing. "He was speechless." It was as if he wasn't really there. Jesus is reminding us that there are times when we show up but we're not really present. Our body is there but we've left the building.

So here's what I wonder. What if this man had said something, anything? What if he had just made his presence known, not so much to the king but to himself? What if he had said,

- I was hungry. I smelled the food. I trusted you to feed me.
- I was lonely. I saw the lights on. I trusted you to take me in.
- I was thirsty. I knew there would be wine. I trusted you to give me a drink.
- I was naked. I knew people would be well dressed. I trusted you to clothe me.
- I was sad and grieving. I heard music and laughter. I trusted you to share your joy.
- I was empty. I saw abundance. I trusted you to fill me.
- I was dying. I saw the door was open. I trusted you to give me life.

What if he had said any one of those or a thousand others things like them? It would have been enough. He would have shown up with all that he was and all that had. He would've been present. Then the king would have said to him, "Oh,

my dear friend, I'm so glad you got my invitation. I'm so glad you are here. Let's get you a robe. You are enough."

I've always had trouble with the last line of this scripture... For many are called, but few are chosen". Why invite all these people if only to have already chosen who is worthy? It wasn't until I was researching and writing this that I came to realize who does the choosing. It's me, it's us, and the chosen are the ones who understand that the time for bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven is now -- not later, not tomorrow, not someday, but now.

Maybe Matthew's issue is not so much that the wedding guest showed up dressed like an episode of "What Not to wear" but that he was unaware of the urgency of the invitation. He did not realize -- or, he was never informed of the fact -- that a summons to God's banquet means an immediate call to action. Every day we get the opportunity to choose what to wear so that the whole of the world can see who we are and what we are about. Will we choose to be present and be a presence of God's love to all around us? Will we choose to clothe ourselves in the kind of love and compassion, birthed by God's own righteousness?

