**19th SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON: Matthew 22:1-14**

**October 11, 2020**

In today’s Gospel from Matthew 22, Jesus continues his teaching in parables. Here he tells a disturbing parable in some ways, and it doesn’t have a happy ending. But it’s a parable with several important lessons.

At the outset, let us remember that this a parable about the KINGDOM of heaven --- and Jesus likened it to a ***wedding feast***. *I think it’s significant that Jesus often compared his kingdom to a feast or a banquet. For to be part of God’s kingdom is like going to a party -- a festive occasion and a time of joy. Jesus wants us to understand by this, that the greatest joys this life has to offer are found in his kingdom.* ***This is the first lesson****.*

Now this is to this kind of Kingdom – like a wedding feast -- that the king sent out his servants to call those who were invited. But those invited wouldn’t come. So he sent more messengers to say, “Look, it’s going to be a great party -- lots of food and fun!” But they, "We’ve got other things to do. Sorry, can’t make it. We’d love to, but we’re just too busy. You know how it is.”

*And you know how the king felt, don’t you? We’ve all had that happen to us at some time or another. The big day comes. You planned for thirty and you got eight. You know how it feels. You want to cry. And I think we know how the king in this parable felt. If we do, then in some small way, we know how God feels whenever one of us rejects his invitation to be a part of the kingdom that he has prepared for us. This is the* ***second lesson****.*

But it got even worse. Those invited not only refused to attend; some seized the servants, mistreated them, and even killed some of them. So the king is furious. He punishes those rebellious people. Then he decides to extend the invitation to this feast to anyone and everyone who wanted to come: *"’Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests."* (Matthew 22:9-10).

*Let us pause for a moment for some interpretation: The king in this parable is God, and the first invited guests were his chosen people, the Jews. The servants God sent to them again and again were the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus himself. But the prophets were rejected and persecuted, many put to death. John the Baptist was rejected and beheaded. Jesus was rejected and crucified.*

*When the Jews rejected the kingdom, the invitation was then extended to anyone and everyone who wanted to come. Notice that by the end of the parable, there is no one who is not invited to the son’s wedding feast. And that is the* ***third lesson*** *of the parable – the invitation is for everyone.*

*When God throws a party, it’s the biggest bash in town, and there isn’t a single person who is left off the invitation list. The only thing that leaves us out of the feast is our own indifference and our own stubborn refusal to accept the invitation.*

So, it’s easy to understand the parable to this point, but then there is this “incident”: The king came in to see how the banquet was going, and he spotted someone without a wedding garment and he was furious. Why? You see, weddings were such an important occasion in that day and time that people were expected to wear the proper clothing.

It’s important for us to remember that accepting an invitation means accepting the terms of the invitation. If we go to eat at a restaurant which has a sign out front that says, “Coat and tie required”, we can’t go wearing jeans and T-shirt and expect to get a good reception at the door. This guy without a wedding garment thought he could come to the king’s feast on his own terms.

This then is **lesson four**. It is often the case with us. We want to be a part of the feast, but we don’t want to submit ourselves to kingdom’s terms. To be part of God’s kingdom means a diligent effort to live up to kingdom’s terms. And the wedding garment is a metaphor of the kingdom’s terms.

In the Bible, the wedding garment or clothing stands for spiritual change. Paul wrote in Romans, take off your old cloth – the old life, and put on the new cloth, new life. (BAPTISM)

William Barclay sums all these up beautifully when he comments regarding the central implication of accepting the invitation to enter and to partake the banquet of the Kingdom.: "The door… is not open that we sinners may come and remain sinners, but that we sinners may come and become saints" AMEN