



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Blvd, port St. John FL 32927

Trinity 20
October 22, 2023

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the Sermon is taken from the Gospel:

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There are some Gospel passages that are terrifying. Of those, this parable may be one of the most so. We want to think of God as sweetness and light, of forgiveness, and especially as Love. We aren't as enthusiastic about God as judge. We aren't so much against God sitting in judgement of our neighbors, but we bristle to acknowledge God's authority to be the judge of us.

The purpose of this Gospel is not so much to paint God in a terrifying light, but to make it very clear to us what it is that God cares about most. The answer, as revealed in this parable, is very simply the two great commandments, which we hear every Sunday at the beginning of the Liturgy. We shall love the Lord your God with all our heart and with our mind and with all our strength. And the second is like, namely this, that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

We are quick to recognize the first part of the parable as a condemnation of the Pharisees, or

even of the Jews as the Chosen of the first Covenant. We are not so quick to recognize its relevance to us as a warning about violating the first and Great Commandment. After all, how could it apply to us. We aren't worshipping golden calves or pagan gods. We proclaim ourselves to be Christians, so this lesson could not possibly apply to us.

And yet it does. The ones first bidden to the feast were good and acceptable subjects of king. In fact, the excuses they offered for not coming to the Feast were the excuses that were reasonable exceptions from Jewish duties under the Law. St. Matthew's version of this parable is more specific to the particular exemptions. Inspecting a newly purchased piece of land, testing a new brace of draught animals, attending to your own wedding were all perfectly acceptable reasons under Mosaic Law to justify putting one's own business before the service of God. The people referenced in the parable weren't idolaters and pagans, they were good church going folk using the loopholes of the law to put their own desires above their primary duty.

The purpose of this portion of the parable is to remind us that God does not judge the letter of the Law, but He judges the spirit. That should give us all pause, to think twice about our own worship. There are so many intrusions of life that help us rationalize the dereliction of our duty to come to the Feast, to come to worship, or to be attentive during worship.

We should ask why the King even cares about the attendance of the guests. He has all the power, the riches and the glory that he could ever need. The truth is that attending the feast is for the benefit of the guests. This is the opportunity for the guests to share the joy the King has in the relationship with His Son. It is the opportunity to offer thanks for the blessings and protection that the guests have received from the King. It is also their opportunity to petition the King for those gifts they still want and need. Who would miss the opportunity to do that? The answer is that people who are satisfied with their lives, comfortable in their means and preoccupied with their hobbies are the people who won't come. It was that way with the Jews of Jesus's time, and it is that way with us today. We rationalize our absence. We have excuses that we believe justify our absence.

These excuses we give ourselves are not terrible. In fact, they are reasonable and understandable, easily forgiven in our own minds, but still subject to the judgment of God. Why is it God demands this fidelity to the purpose for which he created us, to praise and worship with our first and best breath and living? It is not because he is a capricious, arbitrary and vain deity. It is because He loves us. Sharing that love is the sole purpose of our creation. Our excuses satisfy the letter of the Law, but God will judge us by the Spirit of the law.

Which brings us to the second part of the parable, the seemingly cruel and arbitrary binding of the guest who fails the fashion test. You notice the wording is not that the guest came without the proper garment, it was that he failed to come "in" with it. The garment for the halt, the lame and for this guest was already there. It was, as the custom of the day required, made available to the guest by the host. He did not have to acquire a garment, he just had to put on the one that was given him.

We are that unwelcome guest when we come to the feast, but fail to put on the love of Christ, which is the love given to us through the grace of our Baptism and Confirmation.

We "put on" the gown when we keep the second great commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Without that sacrifice of our self-interest, without attending to the needs of our brothers and sisters, we come into the banquet naked.

To come to worship as an intellectual exercise in theology is to fail to put on the wardrobe. To come expecting monastic silence and perfect stillness for our meditation is failing to put on the gown. To come demanding of God that our needs be met and our vanities satisfied, is to be without the gown. The worship God commands is messy and noisy and sometimes uncomfortable. It is that we come as a community to the Eucharist, and put our duties to God in the proper order. Putting on the gown means giving praise and thanksgiving to God first, praying for the people God has given us next, and then making our humble petitions for ourselves, asking what we would have Him do for us, only if it is His will and if our desire is toward God's purpose.

The wedding garment is the sacrificial love of Christ. That is what transformed the boundary of death for this world into the door to everlasting love and life. Unless we put on that sacrificial love, if we come to the transcendent door, wrapped only in our selfishness and pride, then we also will be bound in this world, in the darkness, and with the wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen