

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York  
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany, Hempstead, New York  
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*Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 23A – October 11, 2020  
Isaiah 25:1-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14*

*Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. C: AMEN*

Once again today, we enter Jesus' world in Matthew's Gospel, as he's in the temple in Jerusalem, continuing the conversation he was having, first with the chief priests and elders, and then with the Pharisees and chief priests, about his authority. He's told two parables – which we heard in the last two weeks – that demonstrate his understanding of the lack of authority that the temple leaders have to control the lives of the people of Judea, God's chosen.

Now, he tells a third parable, “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 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”. (Matthew 22:2-10.)

Although this account is like the parable of the tenants that we considered last week, with a similar outcome: a new group of people are invited into the kingdom of heaven (the banquet, in the term of the parable) – instead of the socially well-situated subjects of the king, Jesus tweaks it a bit to include that “both good and bad” people are randomly found in the roads and squares of the city and invited to the banquet. And the king takes vengeance on the people who refused to attend the wedding banquet and who killed his servants who were delivering the second invitation. The king kills them and burning their city. It is difficult for us to see our loving God in this king.

And then Jesus continues his parable: “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.’” (Matthew 22:11-13.)

This might be hard to understand, at first blush. How could someone brought into the banquet from the streets be expected to be attired in clothing appropriate for a king’s wedding reception, we wonder. What we don’t know from the parable itself, but do know about the practices of the day from biblical scholars, is that there would have been a supply of proper robes for the wedding feast—right at the door of the king’s palace – for the newly invited guests to wear during the festivities. Everyone who entered would have been given a robe. The man without one, therefore, had chosen not to use what he was given. He was not doing what was expected and required of him to participate in the banquet.

To apply the allegory analysis to this portion of the parable, the newcomers to the kingdom of heaven, or the followers of Christ, if we claim to be believers a certain standard of living is required of us. Otherwise, we should not consider ourselves to be part of the Christian community. This concept is akin to Jesus’ message to his disciples that if they follow him, they will have to bear their own crosses. As Jesus concludes the parable, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (v.14.)

We may find this to be different from the images rendered by Isaiah and the psalmist in the readings we heard earlier, about God’s hospitality: “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.” (Isa. 25:6.) Likewise, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” (Ps.23:5.) These sound like open invitations to anyone to participate in the feast.

But let’s look more closely at these passages. Someone who enjoys the feast on the Lord’s mountain in Isaiah 25 also is living as a refugee under the protection of God – they’re probably not particularly free to come and go, or to invite others to the

feast. And God has destroyed cities and caused ruthless people to be in fear (25:2-4).

And in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, the sheep who is protected and provided for by its shepherd must remain as part of the flock to sustain that protection (Ps. 23). It's not free to roam.

Even Paul, in praising the faith of the Philippians, and encouraging them, urges them to put aside disagreements ("be of the same mind in the Lord," 4:2) so that they can work together to spread the Gospel and to nurture the growth of God's realm on earth.

We have responsibilities as citizens of our country, state, county, town, and village. This is true for us as well, as citizens of the community of Christ and of the realm of God. True, when we fail to carry out those responsibilities, but we recognize our failure and repent, God will forgive us.

And that brings us to the end of the parable; how can our forgiving God toss the man without a robe into "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Indeed, the man was asked why he was robeless and, rather than acknowledging his failure, repenting, asking to be permitted to put on a robe at that time, he remained silent. He chose to be ejected from the party. Jesus is reminding us that we have responsibilities to him, to God the Father, to one another, to the Christian community in our lives as believers. If we choose not to carry out those responsibilities, we will be excluding ourselves from the community of the church.

This week we have experienced the entry of two of our sisters in faith into the church triumphant at the ends of their earthly lives. I've known both Carol and Dienamarie for only about fifteen months, but I came to know them as disciples who carried out their responsibilities as Christians. Carol served as an Assisting Minister in worship, attended Bible Conversations regularly and agreed to Chair the transitional ministry committee for Grace. Dienamarie, even when she still was undergoing treatment for cancer and working as an art teacher, volunteered to create a "one room Sunday school" for Epiphany, carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to the children of the community of Christ at Epiphany. We can look to both

of their lives as models of discipleship, as participants in God's banquet who behaved in opposite fashion to the man without a robe.

Let's pray. Your call continues to be challenging, Lord. You are the generous host who feeds us, provides for us and leads us. But leading necessarily means that you expect us to follow. Give us the strength to do that when we are tired and feel overborne. Give us the courage to do that, when we feel threatened. Give us the compassion to do that when we are tempted to protect ourselves by turning inward instead of serving others. Send your Spirit, Lord, to fill us, to guide us, to move us. In Jesus' name we pray.           **C: AMEN**