

The 20th Sunday after Pentecost
“The RSVP of RSVP’s (Matthew 22:1-4)
October 15, 2023
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 20th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 22:4.

“And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.””

So far the text...

“Come”. A simple invitation. The one and only true religion of life in Jesus Christ can be distilled into invitation to come. Come to His wedding feast. For Jesus is betrothed. Yes, you heard that right. Jesus has a bride, and the bride is His church, all the people who have accepted His invitation – all the people who confess Jesus as Lord – the few who are chosen – the few who have the proper wedding attire of Jesus righteousness – given and robed in one’s baptism.

It is truly amazing how the one true faith – the whole of the Christian religion can be taught in a 14 verse parable. It’s all here - God’s desire that none would be lost, that all men would be saved by receiving His gracious invitation to come and enjoy the feast of feasts now, and in its complete fullness and glory in heaven...and also God’s justice and wrath against all who would refuse His invitation to come and spend eternity in torment and suffering.

We’ve been hearing on the news of the hostages in Gaza strip who are likely being tormented and abused like those that were found dead in Israel after unspeakable atrocities. Hell is all of that to the nth degree – being bound and cast into the outer darkness where there is eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God does not want that to happen to anyone. He wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the King's Son.

“1 Timothy 2:4

“who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

God wants all men and women to understand the truth as Paul related to the Philippians in chapter 3 which we heard last week that he counts

“all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,”

This is why Jesus spoke to them again. And again. And again. He's reaching out to the Chief Priests and Pharisees on this Tuesday of Holy Week. His last day of public teaching before His crucifixion. He's reaching out to them one last time even as they plot His death. Jesus spoke the parables of the two sons, the wicked vinedressers, and today's parable of the wedding feast to them. He's reaching out to us!

In each of the parables, Jesus offers His Kingdom of grace, but also a warning of punishment if it is rejected. The son who said he would go but didn't, represents these church leaders who are told that tax collectors and harlots will enter before them. Why? Because **“John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him;”** You did not believe that John pointed to Me the Savior of the world. You believe that you can enter by your own righteousness! Impossible for men! They are entering before you now. Repent and you too can still enter.

Again, Jesus spoke the parable of the evil vinedressers who were given everything they needed in the vineyard and yet they didn't produce fruit but beat the servants and killed the Son. The Kingdom of God's grace is taken away from those who reject it and the vineyard is given to others, other nations, Gentiles including you and me to work in their season.

The invitation to come to the wedding feast is heard over and over, again and again in our time and in our season. The covenant people, Israel, received the invitation first, yet they rejected it. They killed the messengers, the prophets and apostles. When the King heard of this, He destroyed them – in 70 AD when Jerusalem was surrounded and the temple was destroyed. God's covenant relationship with Israel

ended. Only a remnant of believers survived. But, that didn't stop God from filling up His wedding hall even though His covenant people had rejected Him.

That didn't stop God's wedding feast. He sent His servants out to the highways and street corners, anywhere people were gathered and invited and invited – everyone who can be found – both good and bad, that is, according to human judgement...tax collectors, harlots. For God wants His banquet to be full. He wants all people to be saved. And that includes you and me.

This day you have received the invitation to come to the wedding feast. All is ready. Jesus died for the sins of all people and rose again in victory! All is prepared for you to enjoy. God thought about you this day as He invites you to come.

Everyone likes to receive an invitation. Sometimes it's an informal spur of the moment invite. We're getting together all the teammates after the competition for a little celebration. The kids can go swimming. We'll have a lifeguard, and we'll have a little barbecue. Can you come? Well, what time does it start? Come at 5pm. And then a text is sent out again. Are you coming? Sure, we're on our way.

Most RSVP's are informal like that. It's a French anacronym. Please respond *Répondez s'il vous plaît*,

Some invitations are more formal. We need your formal response by letter to know if you're coming. Basically, we need to plan enough place settings and have enough food, drink, etc. And it's a courtesy to respond to someone who has taken the time to send you a nice invitation to a wedding or birthday party.

Now of course, one can't always go to every event that one is invited to as we all know. There may be previous commitments or plans that were made. There may be higher priorities than attending a function as fun as it may be. Sometimes the response is "no". I'm sorry we can't attend but maybe you send a gift anyway.

The invitation to the wedding feast in today's parable, however, is the one invitation that no one should decline. It is of the highest importance that one responds "yes, I'm coming". For the invitation is to a banquet of the finest food and drink for the soul – forgiveness, peace and joy. And it is the greatest celebration to be in the company and honor of the King's Son Jesus. There is no

greater feast known to mankind. This invitation comes with the RSVP of RSVP's. It must be answered "yes". For to answer "no" is fatal to the soul. To answer know is to be separated from God for eternity in anguish and darkness.

And yet, there are those who make light of the invitation. I have better things to do on my farm, or more important things to do in my business. Oh, the materialistic things that are put before the Kingdom of God as more important!

And this parable is spoken to us also because we too who have accepted the invitation and cherish the excellencies of knowing Jesus can also easily fall and put other things before God -other things become more important than hearing God's Word and receiving the Sacrament of the Altar faithfully.

All of us have the Pharisee and the hypocrite in us that wants to lead our thinking to believe that I'm worthy by my works to enter the wedding feast on my merits. I don't need to come to God's house as He commands me to do in the 3rd commandment. I know what's better for my soul than God does. Oh, how we need daily repent and drown the Old Adam and put on anew the robe of righteousness of Christ's forgiveness.

Oh, how we need to see our great need of coming to the Lord's table often to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus and find my peace and salvation in this excellency of knowing Jesus my Savior! All else pales in comparison. All else is rubbish. The Lord's Supper, His banquet of grace is the high point of each and every week! So, our Reformation fathers celebrated the Lord's Supper each Sunday for our soul needs to be refreshed often. This RSVP to come to the Lord's Table cannot be discarded and forgotten. For then the soul will eventually starve.

Again and again, Jesus told parables to extend His grace filled invitation to all people. Many are called. The invitation is sent out over the millennia until that day when the King's Son appears. And all who are properly dressed with Jesus' robe of righteousness will enter into the eternal glory of heaven!

One man in the parable didn't have the proper wedding attire. It was too late to respond to the RSVP on judgement day. He couldn't respond. His voice was silenced. There was nothing he could say to plead his case. There was no place reserved for him in the banquet hall. His place was outside in the darkness and

torment of hell. He represents the many who are called. Many more are called than are chosen. Which leads each of us to look deeply into our souls and ask “Is it I?” Have I responded to the King’s invitation to believe in His Son Jesus?

Then by the power of the Holy Spirit, answer yes. I believe in Jesus my Lord who has washed me of my sins in my baptism and feeds me His very body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. I thank God that He has made me worthy by Jesus’ blood and righteousness, and I too will share this glorious invitation to others to come. For this is the most important invitation that anyone can receive in one’s life. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, this is the most important RSVP that one can give in one’s life. Yes, I’m coming to the wedding feast. Hold my place. Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)