

19th Sunday after Pentecost
October 11th, 2020

“To the invited: Come to the wedding, for all is ready!”
(Matthew 22:4)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 22:4

“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.”’

Here ends our text.

I. God’s gracious invitation is often refused by the many

This parable that Jesus presents to us is one that caught my attention quickly and maybe yours too. Why? Because it is so foreign to our lives post Covid-19! Banquets? Parties? Celebrations? That’s not the world we’ve been living in, is it? At times we’ve been barred from any social occasions. It’s been mainly drive by parades, honking of the horns and some waving. Nobody was invited to get out of the car. As the number of new cases of Covid went down, restrictions have been eased. Parties were limited to a certain number of people according to the venue size. Any dancing was social distanced, and the one main required piece of attire was, of course, a mask.

How we miss the good old days of just going to a wedding reception without all the rules and worries! How we miss just going and enjoying the occasion! So, when we hear about a wedding banquet without any restrictions today in our Gospel...just come...and enjoy...it strikes us as out of this world doesn’t it?

Well, it is out of this world, because the parable of the wedding banquet that Jesus tells on Tuesday of Holy Week is again about heavenly things that are being offered to earthly sinful men and women. The banquet invitation is given to you

and me and everybody in this world pre-Covid and post-Covid! All is ready! Just come! Believe in Jesus for your salvation!

Ever since God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, God sent His servants to the people over and over again with this invitation to come to the wedding banquet. God's chosen people the Israelites were especially sent many prophets over the centuries. The invitation to the wedding banquet was an invitation to receive through faith, the salvation that God gives through the Messiah, Jesus!

In the Old Testament, there were so many calls to the people of Israel to trust in the work of salvation that God would bring through the Seed of Abraham. Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 25 is but one example.

**“And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people
A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees.
7 And He will destroy on this mountain
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.
8 He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.”**

What an amazing feast the Lord has prepared...choicest meats, the best wines that have matured on the lees of the yeast to become full bodied wines! Oh, but what is the cause of celebration for this feast? It is the ending of death! It is the swallowing up of death that has been a veil over all people and has caused so much sadness and tears.

Oh, how our community mourns the death of many loved ones because of Covid! But, God's word gives the reason for a celebration at the believer's death, for death is not the final word. As we heard Paul say in Philippians 1:21 three Sundays ago, "For to me, to live is Christ and die is gain." Isaiah says that the Lord will destroy on this mountain, this special mountain called Golgotha, man's worst enemy. The Lord will do this through His Son Jesus, the Bridegroom of today's parable!

For as we heard last week in the parable of the wicked vinedressers, the Son will be killed. He who was the stone rejected will become the Chief Cornerstone and this is marvelous in our eyes!! Why is this marvelous? Because He rises over death three days later!! And that is how the rebuke is lifted from God's people. There is no longer any condemnation in Christ! (Romans 8:1)

Who would not want to be at the celebration of this feast of life where death has lost its sting? (1 Corinthians 15:55) How could this invitation to life in Jesus Christ ever be rejected? But, it was by many. Oh, our parable describes the reaction of the "never repenters". I have more important things to tend to in the affairs of this world. They made light of it. No time to hear, meditate, and enjoy the precious Gospel invitation! They even killed the messengers.

Jesus is not letting up for a moment on the chief priests and elders who are still listening to His parables. When Jesus finished speaking the parable of the wicked vinedressers who beat the servants and killed them, they knew Jesus was speaking about them. Those who received the invitation to the wedding did the same. We see the absurdity in the actions of the Jewish leaders. Who kills another for simply giving them an invitation? But that's what they did to the prophets and finally to Jesus.

And, again, Jesus emphasizes that this does not go unnoticed. There are consequences for their violent rejection of the invitation to believe in Jesus. For the invitation to the wedding banquet is the Gospel call of salvation. What are the consequences? They are the same as we heard last week in the parable of the wicked vinedressers. He will destroy those murders...miserably. Jesus describes in greater detail what miserably means. Their city will be destroyed, burned to the ground. As we heard last week, in 70 AD. Jerusalem was destroyed.

But that's not even the end. For the Lord declares these unbelievers "unworthy" to enter the banquet. And at the end of today's parable, the miserable destruction of the unworthy is described in detail.

"Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 22:13)

The rebuke of the unrepentant sinner remains upon him and the veil of death is not lifted. An eternity of hell awaits the person who rejects the wedding banquet invitation to believe in Jesus!

II. God's gracious invitation is received by the few

But, the wedding feast is not cancelled! God's plans do not change because many refuse to believe. No! God wants His banquet hall to be filled! He wants all people to be saved! And here we see the extraordinary mercy and zeal of God to reach out to all sinful men. For the invitation was not limited to the Jewish covenant nation who rejected Jesus. No, the vineyard was taken away and given to others who would produce fruits of faith. The invitation to the wedding is extended to others to come for all still remains ready! The King, God Himself, redoubles His efforts to get the invitation out! Go to the highways – as many as you can find!!!

There is no prequalification as to who can come. Having a past criminal record, or sordid past does not disqualify you. No, both good and bad, that is, in the eyes of men are invited. You know, that includes the tax collectors and harlots that we heard about in the parable of the two sons. There are those who said they wouldn't go into the vineyard and later relented, later repented. And they are most welcome.

For everything is ready. All one has to do is come. You come as you are because you will even receive a wedding robe that makes sure everyone knows you are a part of the banquet. The wedding robe makes you worthy. The wedding robe is the righteousness of the Savior, Jesus, who gives His righteousness for our sinful rags. If you still want to wear your rags, well, it becomes very obvious to the King. In this world, nobody can tell who the true believers in the church are and who are the hypocrites. But, come judgement day, the King can tell. And, those with the sinful rags are thrown out. Many are called but few are chosen. Many want to hold on to their own self-righteousness instead of humbling themselves with contrite hearts.

Who are those invited from the highways? The Gentiles, you and me. The gracious invitation has reached us also! Oh, don't ever turn it down! It is the invitation to live in heaven for all eternity with God and all believers in Jesus! The best part is that everything, and I mean everything, is ready. Jesus made all things ready by His perfect sacrifice on the cross. He said "It is finished!" and there is nothing more that needs to be prepared. Your complete salvation has been won for you and all mankind. Jesus has opened heaven to you by His death. The veil in the temple was torn and the veil of death was lifted.

This is the most important invitation of your life and if you refuse it, there aren't any other offers when judgement day arrives. For the many who are thrown out of the banquet, there is an eternity of wailing and gnashing of teeth.

For the few who believe in Jesus, it is their marriage feast, for Jesus is the church's bridegroom. Jesus presents His bride as pure and spotless.

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25)

Oh, what love we see from the Father that He would send His Son to give Himself for the church. And by the washing of water by the word, baptism, the invited receive the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness. You who believe and are baptized are wearing this wedding banquet robe even now as we await for the heavenly feast to begin!

As we wait, we treasure our invitation. We read His word and hear His Gospel promises in many beautiful ways. We are invited to come often to His table and receive Jesus' very body and blood for our forgiveness. We are assured that all is ready for our eternity in heaven!

And, we who have been invited into His vineyard, by the power of the Holy Spirit are called to bear the fruits of repentance and a life of service to the Lord. The Holy Spirit moves each of us to have the same unrelenting compassionate desire to go to the highways and invite as many as you find to know Jesus, the Savior. On your highway of life as you meet many, invite both good and bad, no prejudging, to humble themselves before the King and accept His gracious invitation to believe in Jesus.

So, though not many parties or banquets are happening these days throughout the world because everyone is being extremely cautious not to spread Covid, there is one banquet that is still happening and has never been cancelled. And all of God's people are called to spread this invitation to the wedding banquet to as many as you find!

There is no limit of the number who can safely enter. All who enter are safe by the blood of Jesus! It's a simple invitation: “All things are ready.” Jesus has died and risen for you. “Come to the wedding!” Believe in Jesus and you will be saved eternally! By receiving your invitation, your name is written in the book of life. It's no wonder that Paul says in the very next verse of our epistle reading from Philippians 4: 4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice.” Amen.

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