

The Feast is ready

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost) is Matthew 22:1-14. This text is the Parable of the Wedding Feast.

Jesus graphically portrays God as reaching out to people, bar none, with his inviting grace. God is anything but a silent God. Proactively he not only prepares the finest feast but also invites . . . and invites . . . and invites. Thus Jesus signals our accountability to the God who cares enough to search us out, and he welcomes our arrival in the Kingdom with celebration and whistling bells. We need to value these times of worship and celebration. Though our divine services here still bear the stigma of human limitation, they are true foretastes of the eternal banquet.

All who choose to ignore our accountability to God cheapen God's grace. In fact grace is supremely costly—it cost his Son! Bonhoeffer wrote: “Grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it cost a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life” (Quoted by Thomas F. Loftus in *Augsburg Sermons, Gospels, Series A*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974, p244).

We can understand the king's anger when his servants who carried the invitation were put to death, especially when the final Messenger was his own Son. But when the king sends a servant to the “streets and alleys . . . [to] bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Luke's parallel), we know that God's grace is truly nondiscriminatory.

This parable is addressed to the religious leaders of Israel and primarily speaks a word of judgment and warning against them. It repeats three important themes from the previous one (21:33-46), specifically Jesus' divine Son-ship, Israel's persistent rejection of its prophets, and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's kingdom.

The wedding feast of celebration might last 7 days or even 14 days. Certainly it was quite an honor to be invited, and the host would have made lavish and expensive preparations. The provisions of God for the happiness of men are most abundant and free, and His invitations to them to come and receive according to their wants, are most urgent and sincere.

All of the people who are invited to the king's banquet are unworthy of His invitation. Every sinner who receives this invitation in penitent faith must confess together with Martin Luther, “I believe that I cannot by my own things or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.”

Israelites expected invited guests to wear festive wedding garments, which the host could provide. Thus, this fellow's failure to dress in appropriate clothing, which was freely given to him, offends the host. This garment signifies the righteousness of God, which covers our sin (cf Is 61:10; Gal 3:27).

Though we in no way deserve mercy, the Gospel earnestly invites us to come and join the Lord in His eternal heavenly banquet.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for preparing a table before us in the presence of our enemies and graciously calling us to dwell in Your house forever. Amen. (TLSB)