**10/15/23**

**Invitation and Acceptance**

**Matthew 22:1-14**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

What a week this has been! Coming off vacation and camping last weekend right into quarantining and forgetting what it feels like to be so lonely at times is not what I expected! I indeed thought that I had bounced back from the stomach pains and other things associated with my entire day spent on the couch last Friday. I thought I just had a reaction with my GERD, or maybe had some 24-hour bug. I mean I was up and at it the very next day, last Saturday, watching Heather run another Knoebels 5K. I got to see the pride and joy on her face following a run in the cold and the rain to capture her very first medal in her age group. Then, of course we got to run around with our nieces and family in the amusement park while enjoying the rides. I even got to enjoy a craft brew or two with my brother in-law, and some time at the campfire with everyone while cooking mountain pies. Now, driving home after visiting the craft show last Sunday was tiring, but I thought that was just the normal thing coming off a fun and busy vacation weekend. Never did I imagine that I was running the gamut of various symptoms related to COVID yet again!

In February of 2022 I do indeed remember being sick, but this time around this COVID battle was definitely different. It hit me, then I kind of felt okay. Then, it hit me harder, like a double punch. I must admit that it was not really until yesterday that I had actually felt like I was back to normal. I am extremely thankful that everyone Heather and I were at camp with did not get sick. I am more so thankful that Heather managed to stay well by the grace of God. That of course includes those several bottles of Lysol that we managed to go through in our very household, as you would have thought Heather was freshening the air everywhere she went. However, that and wearing masks and isolating on the other side of the house is indeed what kept her well. She knew what she was doing, and this indeed was not our first rodeo.

Unfortunately, what I did notice is that many of us in our very congregation got sick. I found some people were sick a week or two prior to me being sick, and some people have been sick over the same time that I have been. It has been very concerning and scary for sure, as I do believe I counted up to 10 people that I was aware of that had been sick in these last few weeks. We of course are reminded that there is no one to blame, as COVID is for sure a tricky thing whether we have had our vaccinations or do our best to clean and keep places sanitized. Despite being frustrated with being sick many of us probably needed that time to slow down and recenter ourselves too, that is whether we want to admit to that or not. Unfortunately, sometimes being sick is the only way we are forced to slow down from our normal daily lives and overly busy routines. I must admit it was hard making the decision to have today’s Worship Service be Conference Call Only, but I am glad after talking to so many of you that you were indeed understanding and supportive. I was indeed reminded not to be stubborn, and that we are blessed to have technology to be able to still gather together and do what we do for Worship Service. So, as you sit on your couch or chair at home, I want to thank each and every one of you all for joining us on the Conference Call here this morning. I will inform you that I am actually at church, and standing at the altar as we talk this morning. I am here so that there is no question with our celebrating the Lord’s Supper with one another later during this Conference Call Worship Service. I quite honestly am also up here trying to force some normalcy back into my life.

Now, I also want to thank each and every one of you who called, texted, emailed, or reached out in any way. I am thankful for all of your prayers and concern for myself and others, as well as your willingness to make some change in your life to accommodate how we are doing church today. I am prayerful that those of you that have been sick this last week or two have managed to find some inner peace and healing. I am hopeful that those of you that are still going through some stuff will continue to heal and improve as well. I know for certain this past week allowed me to have many more talks with God, and allowed me to get caught up on a lot of reading for seminary. I am hopeful that you also spent some extra time with God as well, or even dug your nose into a book or two, that you spent some time catching up with people, and more importantly spent some time relaxing and recharging for the kingdom work we all have ahead of us. After all our Church Council Meeting is this Tuesday with quite a few things to vote on, next Sunday we resume our Sunday School classes, Trunk or Treat is right around the corner, we are purchasing and gathering things for Operation Christmas Child, and the Women will be packing up their Christmas stockings to give out to those who visit our food pantry in December. The small and mighty are going to continue to keep rolling along here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, and praise be to God for that!

Well now, I must admit that I did not think that was going to take up so much time talking about, but it was clearly on my heart, and God made sure I hit all those points. So, now that I can rejoice in feeling better, I can focus on the party or the wedding that we were all invited to in our Gospel Reading today. Yes, I indeed said you and I, for when we read these parables and stories how can we not picture putting ourselves in the mix? Doesn’t that make things more real and relatable? I know for certain that each and every one of you has been invited to a wedding or two in your lifetime. Sometimes you got a call and personal invitation. Now, when you got that call you were kind of put on the spot to provide an answer. That is of course was whether you were asked to play an important role in someone’s special day, or just that they really wanted to ensure that you were going to be there and celebrate with them. Then, other times you may have just gotten one of those all too familiar and all too passive RSVP cards in the mail. However, the person that invited you still knows they sent it to you and they would like you to respond. Of course, they do not want to get the card back with a no on it, but I am sure they are more than understanding that your schedule might not line up with their wedding day. However, I am sure each and every one of can unfortunately all admit that a time or two we have either placed that card on a table somewhere and intended to answer it at a later date but then forget to send it back, or we just threw it in the trash and thought that person would not really care if we responded or not. We admittedly manage to really throw things out of balance sometimes. I mean why should we treat their wedding invitation any different than if it were from a very important person, like the King in our story today, or even when God invites us to the ultimate wedding feast? Why would we not be honored to even be invited at all, and maybe find a way to alter our so-called busy life and schedule and make it a point to attend? At the very least why would we not find a few seconds in our busy day to respect the person and respond? Those answers are pretty easy, and yet they actually are kind of hard. You see it is indeed all a matter of perspective, and it is all a matter of choice. Regardless, it is indeed an invitation that we should not minimize or forget about.

Today we can focus on several different aspects of our Gospel Reading. Through various different sermons and research, I found it kind of interesting that only one or two people actually primarily focused on the people not attending, and the person that was actually kicked out of the feast or party. Now, you might ask why that is. Heck, you might even be sitting there and asking why we have not even focused on the bride, “but only the bridegroom – the son of God. And that’s because we as God’s church are the bride. God sent His son to prepare us for this great wedding by dying on the cross. God sent His son to cleanse us from our sins, to dress us in the royal wedding coat, and then to go and prepare a place in the great Kingdom where we as his church – his bride – can be with him forever.” (7) That indeed is pretty cool, and that is also why I had focused on the invitation so much to really start things out here.

First off, if you really think about it, you and I were never even supposed to be invited to this wedding. “Did you realize that? We were the last ones invited. We have a place at the king’s table because the Jewish people rejected His invitation.” (3) We are indeed reminded that, “In the Judeo/Christian tradition, the first people that God invited to the party were the Jews. God invited them through their patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and through the great leader and law giver Moses. But it was not a dynamic, vital relationship that was meant to be. They were angry at God because God didn’t do what they wanted God to do. Or, they decided to add a little spice to the religious side of their lives and to also have other gods like Baal. – Have you ever noticed that those times we are angry at God we do not want to worship or celebrate?” (4) This unfortunately caused the Jews to miss out on things, and those things were indeed life changing, and if we do not pay attention we are going to miss out as well. Thankfully, we became the very beneficiaries of their declined and rescinded invitations. “Even though we may appear to each other as unworthy, God has chosen us, all of us, both bad and good to be part of his family. This new family alliance is inclusive of everyone. Everyone is invited. In the kingdom of heaven, God’s kingdom we are all members of the family.” (6)

Secondly, “Although the Hall was filled and wedding attire was given to the guest, would you believe it, one of the guests did not put on the right attire and was bound, hand and foot and thrown into outer darkness where there was endless weeping, and gnashing of teeth. That guest did not want to put on the wedding garment of repentance; Did not want to cover himself in salvation. He did not have a change of heart and mind. He refused the kings sovereign command and rejected God’s only provision for eternal life.” (5) “Should you foolishly discard your cloak of marriage and become selfish and disregard others in their needs, so will God disregard you in your needs. But remember, you always have a faithful groom, in Jesus who is our Lord and Savior. He is always willing to forgive our unfaithfulness, to welcome us back, and to once more place the wedding garment upon us.” (6)

Now, whether we want to admit it or not we always seem to want to do things our own way. “The problem is that we tend to want to take that cloak off. Our sinful nature does not like that free gift of grace and it desires to find its own way to salvation apart from God and apart from the work of Christ.” (7) Verse 14 indeed reminds us “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (1) Let us respect and love our call and our invitation. Let us be ever so thankful that we are indeed chosen. We could have never had this opportunity, and could have been left on the proverbial outside. Let us continually humble ourselves. God’s love and invitation is for all of us, and more importantly it is also for us to go and share with others!

Amen.

**References**

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 October 15th, 2023

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 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 22:1-14**

 Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God’s kingdom are available

 to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

 1Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2“The kingdom of heaven

 may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3He sent

 his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they

 would not come. 4Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been

 invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been

 slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5But they

 made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6while

 the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7The king was

 enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

 8Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not

 worthy. 9Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the

 wedding banquet.’ 10Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all

 whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

 11“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was

 not wearing a wedding robe, 12and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in

 here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13Then 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.’ 14For many are called, but

 few are chosen.”