

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Called Servants, Deliver the Invitation to the Feast

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“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.” (Matthew 22:8–10, ESV)

What a wonderful Gospel Reading we have for today. The parable of the Wedding Feast is one by which our Lord Jesus reminds us of the history of the Jewish people, their rebellion and God’s justice. It is one in which He shows us the mercy of God towards man. And it is one in which our Lord points us to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb on the Last Day. So it is a parable of the past, a parable of the present, and a parable of the future. Therefore, let us sit at the feet of Jesus as He tells this parable to the Jewish religious leaders of His day, the chief priests and the Pharisees who had challenged His authority in the Temple.

Having been confronted by these leaders of the Jewish church, our Lord waste no time in awaking them to the reality of their past and to the potential future of some. Comparing the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast an earthly king gave his son, Jesus shows these religious leaders what they had rejected in the past and what they were rejecting in the present. Using a parable, Jesus tells of a king who wants to throw a lavish feast in honor of his son’s wedding. Our Lord uses this parable to open the hearts of His hearers to the reality of God’s wrath for those who oppose Him and His mercy for those who heed His call. To awaken those who are unworthy and to comfort those who are made worthy by the Son. The king, desiring to make the guests happy, spares no expense in preparing this feast. Once the feast is ready, the king sends out his servants calling those who were invited to come and celebrate this joyous event. But they would not come. It didn’t matter how much expense the king went to, nor how lavish was the food, the drinks, or the entertainment, nor how honored it was to be on the list of the king’s called guests, those guests refuse to come. They shunned the king, they excused themselves saying they had something more important to do. But this did not deter the king, so he sent other servants to remind his quest that they had been called to come. But as before they ignored his invitation, going instead to their homes and businesses. Some even took the king’s servants by force and abused them, even killing some. When the king was made aware of their refusal to come to his feast, and of their abuse and murder of some of his servants, he became exceedingly angry. Who would dare do this to the king’s servants? Who would reject the king’s invitation? So the king punishes those who were invited yet refused to come. Their refusal meant they were unworthy guests. For to dishonor and shame the king and his son constitutes unworthiness.

Here Jesus reveals the stark truth about the reign of God in Israel, both in the past and even in the present as His ministry is well underway. In the past the Jews killed the prophets and chased after false gods. Now, in the time of Jesus these religious leaders are acting like their forefathers, opposing Jesus, even hating Him. As Jesus moves forward to the cross and the empty tomb, His enemies have come forth, challenging Him with an open and unrepentant opposition. Through this parable Jesus is warning them that if they continue the path they’re walking, they will not be among the invited guest to the Great Messianic feast on the Last Day.

In this parable Jesus is manifesting the Great Messianic feast, pointing forward to the eschatological fulfillment of the OT theme of God as Israel's husband and Israel as Yahweh's bride. The feast our Lord Jesus speaks of is the wedding feast of the Lamb on the Last Day. Now, as the Messiah stands before them, He is the living presence of Israel's God and Husband. Jesus, the Messiah, is, the Bridegroom and those who oppose Jesus are rejecting God's invitation to dine at His Son's wedding banquet. The bride (the people of Israel) are rejecting the invitation to the Great Messianic feast on the Last Day.

As these religious leaders of the Jews hear this parable, they had to know it pertained to them, not only to their past, but to their present situation. Surely, they could connect the dots and see their forefathers who killed God's prophets, constantly rejecting God and the promise of the Messiah while chasing after other gods. Moreover, when Jesus speaks of the king sending his troops to destroy these ingrates, the Jewish leaders had to be reminded of the destruction of Israel and Judah. They had to think, He is saying we are unworthy. Although they listen, these religious leaders are too filled with themselves to hear what Jesus is saying; too filled with themselves to admit that, yes, we are unworthy.

Although those who had been called would not attend, the banquet is still ready, the fresh baked bread and the new wine are ready to be consumed. So the king sends out his servants a third time telling them, ***“The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.”*** (Matthew 22:8–10, ESV) Notice, He didn't tell them to be picky. He didn't tell them to call only those who looked good enough to attend the son's wedding. No, he told them to go and call anyone they could find. Go and gather any and all, including both bad and the good. Thus, the king's *Servants Deliver the Invitations to the Feast* and the wedding hall is filled.

The great feast is underway, and the king moves through the guests to get a firsthand look at those who were honoring him and his son. This feast is his doing, the hospitality is also his. He alone has the authority to receive and to reject guests. As he is walking around the dining hall, he lays eyes on one who is not dressed appropriately. He was not wearing a wedding garment (v. 11). When this man is confronted by the king, he has no response, no excuse, no valid reason for not being appropriately attired. The king acts swiftly, ordering his servants to, ***“Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** (Matthew 22:13, ESV) Dishonoring the king and his son led to the destruction of those who were earlier deemed unworthy, therefore, we should not be surprised that the king takes the same action to one who dishonors him and his son now.

Jesus ends this parable on a sobering note, saying, ***“For many are called, but few are chosen.”*** (Matthew 22:14, ESV)

Studying this parable in its original language, one finds a single word in this last statement by Jesus which summarizes its true meaning. It is found in the word ***“called.”*** In the ESV translation of this parable the Greek word καλέσατε [kalesate] which is translated in verse 9 as ***“invite”***, has the same root καλέω [kaleo] as the word used in verse 3 where Jesus says the king, ***“sent his servants to[call] those who were invited.”*** (Matthew 22:3, ESV) Now, at the end of the parable Jesus says, ***“For many are [called.]”*** The invitation to the king's banquet is not one like you might receive for a birthday party with a RSVP response requested. No, this is not an invitation in the classic sense, but a call, a command.

When our Lord called the apostles (Matt 4:21), the Greek word there for call has the same root as those in our Gospel Reading. So, too, throughout the NT. St. Paul says to Timothy, ***“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:12, ESV)*** Again to Timothy, St. Paul says, ***“who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,” (2 Timothy 1:9, ESV)*** And in his introduction in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, ***“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:1–7, ESV)***

Here, as in so many other places in the NT we are reminded we are “called” to faith, “called by God,” “called by the Gospel,” etc. In fact, this is how Jesus ends this parable speaking of those whom the king sent to “call” as many as they could, from every walk of life, whether good or bad it made no difference, “call” them to join with you in the feast of the king.

We are “called” to tell others that Jesus said, ***“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger . . . All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” (John 6:35, 37, ESV)*** And again He says, ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44, ESV)*** The Father sends you, as His servant, to “call” others, to “draw” others to the wedding feast of His Son, Jesus Christ.

But sadly, ***“many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14, ESV)*** Too many think they don’t have to have a “call,” they can invite themselves to the banquet. They can print their own invitation. But such invitations are counterfeit. Many, simply have other things to do or other things to believe. Life is short, they say, let’s enjoy it for what it is. Carnal pleasures abound, why should we avoid them? That’s life. God, what God? Who wants to believe in a God who punishes? I want a god who only loves, who only shows mercy. I don’t have time to go to church, I’m too busy earning a living. I don’t have time to go to church, I’m too busy having fun. I don’t want to go to church, there’s no one there but a bunch of hypocrites. I don’t want to go to church, the pastor there is always reminding me of my sins. And the excuses go on and on, but the “call” of God continues, and it will never end until the Last Day.

Therefore, just as those who in the parable of the Wedding Feast rejected the “call” to the wedding banquet of the king’s son, many today reject our Lord’s “call” to dine with Him or if they come, they come under false pretense, outwardly acting like brothers in Christ, but inwardly full of uncleanness. They lack the robe with which to attend the feast, the wedding garment, and at the end they shall be tied hand and foot and thrown into the darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These shall hear our Lord Jesus say to them, ***“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23, ESV)***

But as disciples of Christ, our “call,” is to continue to “call” everyone we meet to the Great Wedding Feast of the Lamb. Therefore, our “call” is nothing less than the “call” of the church from the beginning. It started with Adam, it continued through Seth, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; through the Old Testament prophets; the apostles, the early church fathers, Martin Luther, us,

and those yet to follow. We are the servants! Through our daily vocations we live as followers of Christ proclaiming the Gospel through word and deed.

We gather for Word and Sacrament ministry at Divine Service on every Sunday, not to pat ourselves on the back for being called disciples of Jesus, but rather to receive the rich repast our Lord wants to give us, His forgiveness. We also gather to give thanks to our Great and Merciful Lord who called us by His Gospel, offering us His grace, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. It is a day and a time when we are refreshed and strengthened by His Saving Word of the Gospel while we banquet with Him at His table, the Lord's Table in the blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist where His flesh and blood strengthen and fortify us to go forth throughout the week, reminding us of the Great Messianic Feast to come and urging us to invite others to become participants with us in this great banquet. Our call is to remind the world that our Lord Jesus said, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** (***Matthew 11:28, ESV***) Rest now and rest in the future as you dine with me at the Great Messianic Feast when the Bridegroom is united with His bride, the Church, to live for all eternity in the bliss and joy of the new heaven and the new earth. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.