

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost      Oct. 9, 2011    Matt 22:1-14 with references to Philippians 4:4-13 and Isaiah 25:6-9.**

**THE INVITATION OF CELEBRATION or**

**“If you’re not coming to the Party, better bring a flashlight and mouth guard!”**

**Intro- (FLOWERS ILLUS) WHEN YOU ARE JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS THERE IS NOT MUCH JOY IN WHATEVER YOU DO. PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS SAID, “REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS, AGAIN I SAY REJOICE, REJOICE!”**

**PAUL COMMANDS JOY! BUT HOW DO WE DO THAT. CAN I REALLY SAY TO MY CHILDREN, “I COMMAND YOU TO BE HAPPY, TO BE JOYFUL!” LIKE THAT CAN WORK. THE KING IN TODAY’S GOSPEL LESSON WANTED TO CELEBRATE AND EVERYBODY SHOULD HAVE JOYFULLY RESPONDED. WE HEAR IN THE LITURGY, “LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS.” IN LATIN THE WORDS ARE, “UP WITH YOUR HEARTS”. I WANT THAT, I WANT MY HEART TO BE LIFTED UP ESPECIALLY WHEN I AM FEELING ANXIOUS OR TROUBLED AND I AM SURE YOU DO TOO. WHEN GOD COMES TO US, WHEN WE ARE IN HIS PRESENCE.....THERE IS NO TROUBLE.....THERE IS NO CRYING.....INSTEAD WE HAVE CAUSE TO REJOICE.**

**SATAN WOULD ROB US OF JOY! SATAN’S GOAL FOR YOUR LIFE IS TO BRING YOU FEAR, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION.....WHEN YOU ARE IN FEAR THERE IS NO JOY! WHEN YOU ARE ANXIOUS, JOY IS SUCKED OUT OF YOUR LIFE.**

**PAUL HAD PLENTY OF ANXIOUS MOMENTS IN HIS LIFE, YET HE IS CONTENT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. WHY? BECAUSE LIFE FOR PAUL WAS NEVER ABOUT HIM, IT WAS ABOUT CHRIST IN HIM. HE DOESN’T HAVE TO CONSTANTLY THINK ABOUT THE PAIN OR FRUSTATIONS OF HIS CURRENT SITUATION. INSTEAD PAUL SAYS, “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM.” AND IN HIM, “I HAVE THE PEACE OF GOD THAT SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING.”**

**IN THE GOSPEL READING THIS MORNING THERE IS A PARABLE, IT IS PARABLE OF JUDGEMENT AND GOOD NEWS. PEOPLE ARE INVITED TO A FEAST BUT REFUSE TO COME.....IN THE PARABLE NOT ONLY DO PEOPLE REFUSE TO COME BUT**

**THEY ALSO ABUSE AND MURDER THE MESSENGERS WHO BRING THE INVITATION OF CELEBRATION. THUS IN THE KING'S MIND THESE INGRATES, THESE PEOPLE DESERVE A WRETCHED END.**

**THE KING'S REACTION TO THESE PEOPLE IS A NORMAL HUMAN RESPONSE, NOT OUTSIDE THE REALM OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. THE KING SENDS HIS ARMY AND KILLS THE "MURDERS AND BURNS THEIR CITIES." THAT'S WHAT THEY DESERVED. THIS KING HAS A TEMPER! IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE THIS, JUST TRY AND LIVE WITHOUT HIM. DEATH IS WAITING FOR US ALL. CONSIDER THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE "SHEET WHICH COVERS ALL THE NATIONS." THERE IS A 'PALL' OF SORTS THAT THE WORLD WILL COVER US WITH; DEATH. YOU CANNOT HOLD ON TO LIFE, IT WILL SLIP THROUGH YOUR FINGERS AND YOU WILL BE HOPELESS BEFORE IT.**

**AND THIS SHOULD BE MAN'S GREATEST FEAR! THAT GOD WILL REVOKE HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE. GOD HAS DONE THIS BEFORE AT THE TIME OF NOAH, WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE WERE IN THE WILDERNESS COMPLAINING, AND TO ISRAEL ITSELF. IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR MOSES PLEADING ON BEHALF OF GOD'S PEOPLE WHO KNOWS WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN. GOD IS JUST NOT THAT SAFE TO BE AROUND. HIS DEMANDS ARE HOLY, PERFECT, AND RIGHTEOUS.**

**BUT WHAT THE KING IN THE PARABLE DOES NEXT IS ABSOLUTELY ASTOUNDING. THE WEDDING FEAST IS READY, THE TABLES ARE SET, THE FATTED CALF CAN WAIT.....SO THE KING SENDS OUT HIS SERVANTS TO INVITE ANYBODY WHO WOULD COME AND I DO MEAN ANYBODY.....GENTILES, THE UNCLEAN, BARBARIANS, PROSTITUTES, SINNERS OF EVERY KIND.....EVEN PENECOSTALS! (lol) ALL ARE WELCOME TO THE FEAST! WE ARE WELCOME TO THE WEDDING FEAST TODAY.**

**BUT REMEMBER GOD IS NOT SAFE....HE IS HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS, SEPARATED FROM SIN. THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO ATTEND THIS FEAST AND THAT IS WEARING THE GARMENT OFFERED AS A GIFT FROM THE KING! THE GARMENT THE KING HAS PROVIDED IS A FREE GIFT OFFERED TO EVERY PERSON.**

**YOU SEE THE GARMENT WE WEAR STINKS, THE GARMENT WE WEAR IS ALL ABOUT SELF, THE GARMENT WE WEAR IS ALL ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE DONE IN THE PAST AND EVEN CONTINUE TO DO TO BENEFIT SELF FIRST. OUR GARMENTS CONTAIN THE WREKAGE OF HURT AND PAIN WE HAVE BROUGHT TO OUR LIVES AND TO THE LIVES OF OTHERS, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES OF KNOWING WHAT WE SHOULD DO BUT HAVE REFUSED DOING IT. OUR GARMENTS CONTAIN THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF DEATH. AND WE GET SO USED TO WEARING THESE GARMENTS OF SIN THAT WE NO LONGER EVEN SEE WHAT IS RIGHT, THE WAY GOD WANTS US TO LIVE, OR WHAT GOD HIMSELF IS PASSIONATE ABOUT. OUR GARMENTS ARE DIRTY, THEY ARE WORN OUT, THEY NO LONGER PROTECT US OR KEEP US WARM WHEN THE NIGHT BECOMES BITTERLY COLD AND LONELY.**

**STILL GOD INVITES US AND PROMISES US NEW GARMENTS NOT MADE FROM HUMAN ENDEAVORS BUT FROM JESUS HIMSELF WHO CLOTHES US WITH HIS GARMENT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. JESUS HAS SWALLOWED UP DEATH, JESUS HAS DEFEATED OUR FOES, AND THERE IS A PARTY GOING ON, NOT SOME KIND OF PIOUS DOOMFEAST. NO PLACE FOR FROWNS HERE. THE KING REJOICES OVER THOSE WHO RESPOND TO HIS INVITATION, AND BECAUSE OF THE GIFT OFFERED, WE ARE JOYFUL IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCE.**

**BUT THEN THE KING ENCOUNTERS A PERSON WHO REFUSES TO WEAR THE WEDDING GARMENT. HE REJECTS THE GIFT, AND HIS REJECTION OF THE GIFT IS ALSO HIS REJECTION OF THE KING. THIS INVITED GUEST WANTS TO COME TO THE FEAST ON HIS TERMS, HIS OWN TERMS AND NOT THOSE OF THE KING. IT'S AS IF HE'S SAYING, "WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY CLOTHES? MY CLOTHES ARE CLEAN, MY CLOTHES DON'T STINK, MY MOTHER GAVE ME THESE CLOTHES. I WORKED HARD FOR THESE SHOES, THEY WERE EXPENSIVE....MY CLOTHES ARE GOOD ENOUGH!" BUT ONLY THE CLOTHES THE KING PROVIDES ARE GOOD ENOUGH.....NOTHING ELSE IS NEEDED. THE KING IS ENRAGED AND THE UNCLOTHED GUEST IS THROWN OUT INTO THE DARKNESS WHERE THERE IS WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH.**

**YOU SEE THE WEDDING GARMENT WAS A GIFT FROM THE KING....AND THE GUEST STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO WEAR IT. IT KIND OF REMINDS ME OF THE**

**YOUNG MAN WHO ARRIVES AT THE MARINE CORP BOOT CAMP AND TELLS THE DRILL SEARGENT THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO WEAR HIS OWN CLOTHES.**

**YOU SEE THE KING IN THIS PARABLE IS GOD AND THE GARMENT IS THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WON FOR US AND GIVEN TO US AS A GIFT FROM GOD IN THE PERSON OF JESUS. TO REFUSE JESUS IS TO REFUSE GOD AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD MADE AVAILABLE FOR US IN HIS SONS DEATH AND RESSURRECTION. YOU SEE GOD SIZED YOU UP IN YOUR BAPTISM SO THAT THE MOMENT YOU RECEIVED THE GIFT OF FAITH JESUS COVERED YOU WITH HIS GARMENT OF RIGHT-NESS. YOU CAN TRY TO WEAR THE SHIRT YOUR MOM GAVE YOU BUT IN THE END THE STUFF OF THIS WORLD WILL WEAR OUT, SOIL, OR DISAPPEAR.**

**CONCLUSION-SCHOOLMASTER** A bully breaks a classroom rule of conduct which is punishable by several lashes with a switch on the hind end. The boy defiantly goes to the front of the classroom to show the teacher and his classmates that he's a tough guy and that nobody was going to tell him how to behave.. he wasn't going to be intimidated by or be accountable to anyone. The teacher then hands the switch to the boy, bends over and orders the boy to count as he administers the punishment to HIM....The sound of the switch violently striking the teacher echoes down the halls. With each successive blow, the defiant, strong-willed boy's attitude changes.....until he is finally reduced to tears, having learned the meaning of mercy...not getting what he deserved, and experiencing someone who was willing to suffer for him out of shear love.... this is the meaning of grace!

**IT'S NO WONDER PAUL TRULY CAN SAY" REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!"**