

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“You’re Cordially Invited to a Wedding”

Matthew 22:1-14

For three years Jesus had traveled throughout the Holy Land proclaiming the Good News of the presence of the Kingdom of God. And for three years the leaders of the Jews had challenged him at every turn. Their opposition had grown more and more intense until it finally reached its climax during Holy Week. They would finally get rid of him by putting him to death. It was then that Jesus confronted those leaders. Through the use of a number of parables, many of which we’ve looked at over the past few weeks, he sought to confront them in the hopes that they might repent and believe. Today’s Gospel lesson contains one such parable.

When it was all said and done, the point of the parable was painfully obvious. Throughout the history of Israel, God had sent his servants, the prophets, to His people. And throughout their history, they had rejected those servants of the King even as they were now rejecting Jesus, the very Son of the King. Therefore, Jesus said, the Good News of the message of the presence of the Kingdom of God would be taken to the whole world. The world would be invited into the Kingdom, he said, even if God’s chosen people rejected the invitation.

Now Jesus told this parable almost 2,000 years ago, and as it is with many of Jesus’ parables, so this one has that enduring quality that gives it meaning for people of all times and places – even for you and me here today. We, too, are invited to a wedding for the King’s son, that is, we too are invited into the Kingdom for Jesus’ sake. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has called us to faith and, in that, into that Kingdom both now and forever. That invitation has come to us in Word and Sacrament. We affirm that call in many ways – in our worship, in our confession of faith, and in our life, we proclaim that we belong to that Kingdom. But this parable opens up some of the dimensions of what it really means to belong to Christ and to live in that Kingdom.

First of all, it reminds us that to live in the Kingdom of God is to live a life of celebration. When the Scriptures describe God’s Kingdom it most often uses the image of a wedding feast or banquet. The mood that is conveyed is one of joy and celebration and rightly so for we ought to rejoice and celebrate our inclusion in God’s Kingdom and to acknowledge His presence and His grace in our lives day to day.

And yet, how hard it is to rejoice and celebrate sometimes especially when we see war and suffering and starvation and man’s inhumanity to man, political and economic crises and sickness and sorrow and death all around us. And we may ask what is there to celebrate? Perhaps the hymn writer said it best when he said, “This is my Father’s world, O Let me ne’er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father’s world; why should my heart be sad? The Lord is king, let the

heavens ring, God reigns, let the earth be glad!” You see we dare to celebrate because this is still God’s world no matter what and the claim He has made on our lives in our baptism is still good no matter what.

Second of all, this parable reminds us that both the good and the bad are invited into the Kingdom. We are not claimed by God because we deserve it but because God is gracious. Through Jesus He calls us all to be His own for time and for eternity. And as we gather in worship we are reminded that we have come here because no matter who we are – whether old or young, rich or poor, black or white, male or female -- we have a place in God’s Kingdom through Christ and we are compelled to celebrate it with others who have a similar place in that same Kingdom. For when we look at each other we see not who or what the world says we are, we see who or what God says we are – in Christ.

And third of all, this parable reminds us that with the invitation comes a claim of discipleship – discipleship which is represented by those who wear garments fit for a wedding. Some commentators think the wedding garment is nothing less than the righteousness of Christ. And so it may very well be. But other commentators think that it represents the discipleship we are called to within the Kingdom. And that may very well be as well. The parable depicts a particular guest who had accepted the invitation but who was not willing to accept the obligations of a wedding guest that went with such acceptance. Such a guest, Jesus says, forfeits his invitation. “Many are called but few are chosen” Jesus says – that is, many are invited into the Kingdom but few respond in a manner that is consistent with that invitation. We often make the point that we live by the grace of God and rightfully so. We do. And how we love to sing “Amazing Grace” and other such songs. But at the same time we need to be careful that we don’t fall into that spiritual trap that says to live by grace means there isn’t a need for a response of commitment to truly following Christ, to discipleship. To have that idea of grace is, as we said a few weeks ago, simply “cheap grace” and is no grace at all. In fact, Bonhoeffer said that “cheap grace is grace without discipleship.” Cheap grace is to accept the invitation to the wedding but not commit to really attending.

We have all been invited to a wedding. We have all been called to receive and live out the new life of the Kingdom of God already in this world and in the world to come. I encourage you to respond to that invitation once again with celebration and commitment – to celebrate the presence and the grace of Christ today and to commit yourselves to following him with lives of faithful service throughout this coming week. May God bless us all to that end for Jesus’ sake. Amen.