



Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 11, 2020

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”

Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

* Liturgist: Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things.

All: You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.

Isaiah 25: 1, 4a

Liturgist: Come, let us worship the Lord our God.

All Singing: 529 “Gather Us In”
Singing verses 1, 3, and 4

Minister: To God’s people gathered in hope: Grace to you, mercy and peace, from God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Passing the Peace at a Distance

Reconciliation

Liturgist: On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine and the best of meats.

All: On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers the nations; he will swallow up death forever.

Liturgist: The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove this people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

Silent confession and reflection

Liturgist: In that day they will say,

All: Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. *Isaiah 25: 6-9*

* **All Singing: "Surely It Is God Who Saves Me"**
Singing three times

Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my savior.

Liturgist: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.

All: May our gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Liturgist: Do not be anxious about anything, but in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

All: And may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Liturgist: Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from Jesus – put into practice. And the peace of God will be with you.

Philippians 4: 4-9 adapted

Proclamation

Song of Illumination: "Peace Be Still"

Coleman

Peace be still
Peace be still
For the Holy One is here
Peace be still
Peace be still
Oh how God longs for you to stay near

In these dark days I will be with you
I will never let you go
In your grief and doubt I will still be there
Hold fast for it is so

In your brokenness
I will comfort you
With my grace I will heal your soul
In have heard your cries in the wilderness
My child I will make you whole

Scripture: Matthew 22: 1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: What’s the Dress Code?

* **All Singing: 840 “Behold the Lamb”**

The Institution
The Thanksgiving
The Invitation
The Communion

The Acclamation

* **All Singing: 358 “Give Thanks”**

Dedication

Prayers of the People

* **All Singing: 959 “Glory be to the Father”**

* Benediction

Worship Leaders

Pianist/Vocalist: Erin Pacheco
Soloist: Marjie Coleman
Flutist: Lynn Hollender
Sound Engineer: Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister: Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Liturgist: Kim Ottenhoff
Prayer: Wally Ottenhoff
Vocalist: Marjie Coleman

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Norah Van Wyngarden
Liturgist: Jim Sluis
Prayer: Luke Van’t Land
Vocalist: Sarah Rinkenberger

Text: Matthew 22: 1-14
Title: What's the Dress Code?
Date: 10.11.20
Roger Allen Nelson

There comes a time in every preacher's life when the horrific parts of the Bible can no longer be ignored. The Bible is not simply a book about admirable people or even about a conventionally admirable God. Instead, it is a book about a sovereign God's covenant with a chosen people, as full of holy terrors as it is of holy wonders, none of which we may avoid without avoiding part of the truth.

That's Barbara Brown Taylor. And that's fitting for this morning's text. Matthew is stacking up terrible parables at this point in his gospel. So, at the risk of tarnishing the glory of a beautiful fall morning, I invite you to sit with, sit under, sit in this text for a few moments.

Just to refresh...

Jesus has paraded into Jerusalem, disrupted business in the temple, and told the priests and elders that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom before they will. This parable is the next installment in a series of rebukes directed at those leaders. And, the parable is simple and straight forward:

A king is throwing a wedding party for his son. Everything is ready; all the guests have to do is show up. They don't have to bake the bread or bring the wine. They just need to show up. But, they don't come. They're busy, they're indisposed, they've got other commitments. With one excuse after another they decline the invitation. Alas, the king will not be undone by the rudeness of the guests. So, the servants are sent back to the streets to bring in anyone who will come – the good, the bad, and the ugly – until the great hall is filled.

In my parents feeble and futile efforts to steer me away from the evils of rock-n-roll they bought an album by a bunch of singing nuns with guitars. 50 years later I still have the Medical Mission Sisters singing in my head. Maybe you know one of their songs:

*I cannot come. I cannot come to the banquet, don't trouble me now.
I have married a wife; I have bought me a cow. I have fields and commitments
that cost a pretty sum. Pray, hold me excused. I cannot come.*

Delightful song, but the nuns didn't include the king scorching the earth of those that turned down the invitation. And, there's no mention of the interloper who gets caught without proper attire and promptly gets bounced into the alley.

Truth be told, the Medical Mission Sisters aren't alone in their gentler version of the parable. In the Gospel of Luke, the parable ends with the banquet hall full and the party in full swing. No one gets scorched; no one gets booted. There's no weeping and teeth gnashing. But, this morning we have Matthew's version with its darker ending. What are we to make of it?

Many interpreters see this story as an analogy with every character accounted for....

King = God.

Son = Jesus.

Party = the great marriage feast of the Lamb.

Slaves = prophets.

First invited = Israel.

Violence = Israel rejecting the prophets.

Destroyed city = destruction of Jerusalem temple in 70 AD

Second invitation = Apostles

Wedding Hall = church.

You get the idea. In keeping with Matthew's concern about Jews rejecting Jesus, the whole thing can be read as salvation history in a nutshell. It's a simplistic harsh reading. But, as an example of this take, listen to Martin Luther, from a sermon on this text:

Hence this came to pass when God totally destroyed and burned to the ground the synagogue at Jerusalem, he entirely abandoned faith, scattered the people hither and thither, so that none remained together and they were robbed both of their priesthood and of their kingdom; so that there is not now a poorer, a more miserable and forsaken people on the earth than the Jews. Such is the end of the despisers of God's Word.

Yikes!

Of course, there's also the problem of the bloke in the wrong clothes. The king is tickled that the hall is full of guests, until he sees one man standing by the punch bowl with a plate of chicken and potato salad, wearing cut-offs, flip-flops, and wiping his hands on his t-shirt. Historians think it would have been customary for a host to provide guests with wedding garments, but this schmuck isn't wearing one.

Maybe it didn't fit.

Maybe he didn't know.

Maybe he just showed up.

Maybe he didn't like name tags or party hats or wedding robes.

Whatever the reason, it was an insult to the king, who in turn has him bound up and cast out.

So, if this parable is an analogy, then what of the dress code?

What is symbolized by the wedding garment?

What wasn't he wearing that he should've been wearing to be spared the outer darkness?

No less than John Calvin, and other sturdy biblical scholars, liken it to "putting on Christ." To be attired in the new-self, to be Christ-like. To borrow language from Colossians:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience....

You get the idea. Or, to quote Calvin Seminary professor Scott Hoezee:

...Showing up in a business suit as you try to squeeze a little God into a life which is mostly still clogged with the things of this world does not work. God will spot you every time. You need to look like someone who was crucified with Christ. You need to wear a festive resurrection outfit that does not quite fit in with the rest of the world's fashions.

Ah...

And, therein lies the rub.

Therein lies the holy terror and the holy wonder.

Therein lies the mystery.

The wedding guest responded to the invitation. He came when the king called. He was in the party, under the big tent.

Therefore, if you take this as an "in or out" text...

If you take this as the judgment of God...

Then there must be something more than accepting the invitation...

You have to make sure you dress right, or dance right, or do right. You have to make sure that you have done your part in putting on Christ. You have to accept the invitation and cloth yourself in a wedding robe.

But, what if you struggle to get the robe on, or it slips off, or doesn't fit, or you're not dressed in time? My fear is that if God can throw out an unsuspecting guest for missing the dress code then I'm in trouble. What if I'm found short of faith, short of piety, short of goodness? And, that doesn't seem like such good news, because then it's still

grace plus dress code,
grace plus right behavior,
grace plus right belief,
grace plus....

If it boils down to what I'm doing or what I am wearing?

Again: Yikes!

A few years ago, a congregant offered critique of my preaching with the concern that I skirt references to judgement or hell. In proclaiming the good news, I wasn't clear enough about the bad news. I pled guilty and suggested that we're best drawn to the light rather than scared of the dark. And there's enough darkness in this world as it is.....But, maybe this is one of those moments where I should count the high cost of not putting on the wedding robe.

Except, dear friends, I'm not sure that's the point that Jesus is making. Again, he is offering critique of the priests and elders for not bearing the fruit of the kingdom. Tom Long puts it this way:

When the host demands to know where his wedding garment is, he is speechless, and well he should be. In his self-absorption, he hadn't the foggiest idea until that very moment that he was at a wedding banquet at all. Just so, to come into the church and then not conform one's life to that mercy is to demonstrate spiritual narcissism so profound that one cannot tell the difference between the wedding feast of the Lamb of God and happy hour at the bus station bar.

Dear friends, putting on the garment of Christ is part of the joy of the banquet. Seeking to follow the way of Christ is what you do when you're inside the wedding tent. Loving your neighbor and your enemy, forgiving without demanding the last right word, giving, serving, emptying self... It is all part of the party. To do less, to seek less, to wear less is to short change the host and short change ourselves.

I don't know how to resolve the tension in this text. If it tilts toward a works-righteousness-legalism you lose the joy of the wedding party. If it tilts toward a cheap grace you lose the costly beauty of a resurrection robe. So, maybe the reminder this morning, even as we come to the table, is that we all come empty handed and naked, but we're welcomed, fed, and clothed by Christ. Thanks be to God

May we live in the gratitude and glory of that gift.
May we cloth ourselves in the garment that God has given.
Amen.