

Trinity XX, 2006
Text: Matthew 22:1-14
Trinity Lutheran Church, Worden, IL
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Grace, Mercy, and Peace, to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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

Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a king who sent out his slaves to announce great good news to his people: a wedding banquet for his son. What a joyous occasion and what a privilege for ordinary citizens to be invited to the wedding of the king's own son. But the King in Jesus' parable is surpassingly gracious.

And since it is a parable, we must take heed as to who represents whom. The King, of course, is God the Father. The wedding banquet for his Son is the Feast of Victory for Our God: the great and glorious celebration of the One and Only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his final union to his Bride, the Church, at the end of days. The slaves who announce the good news of the banquet are the prophets of God; and the first people invited are God's Old Testament people, the sons of Abraham according to the flesh, the people of Israel and especially of Jerusalem.

So the prophets go out and invite Israel to the banquet of God's own Son. And their response? The text simply says, "They did not wish to come." What? How can this be? Who doesn't want to go to a party at the King's palace? Who would turn down such a gracious invitation? No one would – that is, no one who believed that such an invitation was real. That is to say, the problem with the people invited is that they do not believe the King. They do not take him at his Word. Perhaps they do not even believe that there is any King.

Put yourself in their shoes: a messenger comes to your door and hands you an invitation to a wedding banquet at the White House. Your response to that invitation will only depend on whether or not you believe it to be genuine. If you believe it to be so you will start packing immediately. You'll get on the phone and order plane tickets and make hotel reservations. You'll see what you can do to arrange time off of work. But then, perhaps doubt will set in. After all, this is a lot of inconvenience – plane tickets and hotel rooms cost money, you already had plans for your vacation days, and it's tough to get the kids caught up at school if they miss a few days. Besides, why would the president invite you? As if the

president even knows or cares that you exist! For all it matters to you, the president might not even exist as far away as he is. No, that messenger must have been a prankster – or a loon – better to play it safe. Better to just stay at home. You wouldn't want to be made a fool of – imagine: showing up at the White House with just this little invitation and then being laughed off the south lawn by the Secret Service when no wedding banquet materializes. No thanks! I don't want to go to any wedding banquets like that!

And so that is the response of the first people to the first invitation. But the King is gracious. God sends out his prophets again. You receive another messenger at your door: No, really, he says, the wedding is real. All is prepared: the most gourmet foods, the finest wines, the President has laid out his best and it's all for you!

Well, what now? In the parable of Jesus the people again react in unfaith. Some are simply fed up with this nonsense about a supposed banquet for a King's Son so they just ignore this deranged messenger and go about their lives: back to the farm or the office. But others get angry: indeed as you might be angry if that prankster with the invitation to the White House showed up again. What do you mean coming here spreading your nonsense about Presidents and wedding banquets at the White House? Didn't I say I didn't want to go? But this messenger insists on repeating the invitation. You slam the door in his face – at the very least. For the people in the parable are even more direct: they seize the King's messengers, beat them, and kill them. And such was the fate of the prophets of old, just ask Isaiah – indeed, just ask Jesus.

And now, behold the wrath of God today in our Gospel lesson: see how real and tangible it is. Jesus says that the King now grows angry, sends his army, kills those murderers and burns their city. My dear Christian friends, behold the wrath of God and how real it is: for this horrible statement of God's impending wrath on unbelief was a prophecy that was fulfilled forty years after Jesus spoke it. For Jesus is the ultimate servant of God and the King's own Son. He came himself to invite the people of Israel and Jerusalem to his banquet. And they rejected him. They did not believe him. And since they did not believe, they treated him foully and killed him. And finally God did come and destroys those murderers and burn their city; for in AD 70, just as Jesus predicted, God sent the Roman armies and razed Jerusalem to the ground because they did not repent and turn to Jesus in faith. You see, the wrath of God is not some far off concept. It is not some rhetorical device preachers use to keep a sermon interesting. It is as real as the blood that flowed ankle deep through the streets of Jerusalem in the spring of AD 70.

So repent. Repent for the King is still gracious. He still sends out other servants – his apostles and apostolic preachers. And they come to you with the same invitation. What Israel rejected now goes to all the world, to you: Come to the wedding banquet! Whether you think you are good or bad, it doesn't matter, for you are invited either way. This invitation is not based on who you are, but on who the King is. He is calling you to his banquet: come to him.

This banquet and this invitation are also very real and tangible, indeed as real and tangible as flowing blood – the Blood that flowed out the pierced side of the Son whose wedding this is. You see, all has been prepared. The sacrifice has been made; the Son himself made it on the cross. Come to a feast where all is prepared for you free of charge. Do not be worried that you are not worthy to attend this banquet. The Son's blood makes you worthy. And the only ones who are found unworthy, who are cast out of the banquet and into that outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, are those who refuse this blood of the Son. For you see, that is the wedding garment required at the feast: the white robe of Christ's righteousness washed clean in Christ's blood. Do not try to come to the wedding banquet with any other attire. Leave your filthy rags at the door. And leave them there happily! For remember: at this banquet all has been prepared. All. Not only the food you eat, but even the clothes you wear. For as Isaiah says, even our righteous acts are as filthy rags before the Lord. But never mind all that because the wedding garment is provided for you.

So Christians, do not cling to your old garments. Do not worry that the Lord's messengers found you, a bad person, in the highways and byways. That is immaterial. For you have been washed clean by the Holy Spirit's bath of water and word. You have been scoured and scrubbed to shining white in baptism. Your rags have been traded in for the robe washed white in the blood of the lamb. Let those old rags go and you will not be speechless before the King, but will instead have something to say to him: "Abba, Father."

And now rejoice in the Feast. For it has begun already. For here at this very altar the wedding feast of the Son takes place. Yes, even now you have a foretaste of the feast to come. Even now the servants of the King bid you, "Welcome to the Lord's Table." Here at this Table all is provided free of charge. And what a banquet it is! The Lamb who was slain gives you his own true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. The Son unites you to himself – his flesh, which is true food indeed, and his blood, which is true drink indeed, are placed into you as the sure promise that your flesh and blood will also be raised and live forever in the

King's presence. This real presence of the Son in his very body and blood at the Altar is the sure promise of your real presence with him forever in a new heavens and new earth. For this Son of the King is an odd sort of Lord – upside down and backwards from our way: when he invites you to his banquet it is he himself who serves you. When he invites you to his celebrate his wedding it is with a crafty twinkle in his eye. For when you arrive at the banquet you discover one more surprise: that you are the guest of honor. That you are the Bride of Christ, his beloved Church, united with him in one flesh. How can this be so? How can you, the wedding guest, also be the bride? You might as well ask the Son how he can be the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world and yet also the Shepherd of the sheep. This Lamb is Judah's Lion after all, and not a tame one. And with a cry that is both a mighty roar and a gentle bleat he calls to you: My Beloved, come to the Feast.

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

Now the Peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus.