

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 22:1-14

Everything is ready. Come to the feast.

This was the feast. God's Son had come to receive His bride, the Church, and to walk her down the aisle, through the cross, to the palace He had prepared for her. This was the feast, and God the Father sent out His invitations to those who should have been most prepared and excited for this day, to the religious leaders of Israel. And what happened? The same thing that happens so often on the Lord's Day still today, when God invites His friends to His feast: they paid no attention and went off.

This was the feast. The oxen and fattened calf had been butchered. Everything was ready. God was throwing the party, and not just any sort of party, but the wedding banquet of all time. Millions watched Charles and Diane wed in the 80's and sneaking pictures of celebrity weddings is big business with a big market. Surely the hall would be packed with guests for God's marriage. Surely nothing would keep someone from a once-in-a-lifetime event like this. One would surely think, but, unfortunately, there were crops to be harvested and money to be made.

This was the feast, and God sent out a gracious invitation, but rather than thanks and congratulations, He received apathy and hatred. Those invited yawned and went on with life or seized, mistreated, and killed His servants, the prophets. This was a feast, intended to bring kindred souls together in a festive celebration of life and love, but those invited turned the day God intended for a blessing into a curse, a night of death and destruction. God wanted to feed them, to pamper them, to introduce them to His Son, but instead they chose His punishment and wrath. And they got it, for those who will not have God's Son will not have God's mercy.

This was the feast, and God was determined to feast with friends. Only, who would His friends be? His supposed friends had shown their true colors when they refused His invitation. Whom should He invite now if those who claimed to love Him most would not join Him? He had an idea; He sent His servants to the streets. God's Son had come to wed humanity, to take His bride, the Church, and there had to be a celebration.

He said to His servants, *"The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find."* So the servants did just that, and invited every soul off the street, good or bad, so that the hall was bursting at the seams with guests. And God the Father rejoiced. Like any proud father, He walked around the hall, greeting the guests, rejoicing to see them rejoice, encouraging them to enjoy themselves, and gushing about His Son. It was a sight to see.

But then something caught His eye. *"Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?"* The question was not so much an accusation as it was an attempt to assist. You see, the wedding garments were supplied by the King Himself, as was the custom at the time. Perhaps someone had neglected to point this man to the proper place to receive His robe. But the man was speechless, as guilty men often are. How often hasn't a brazen teen bragged to his friends about his rebellion only to grow silent and scared when caught? This man was speechless because he was at fault for his shabby attire. It was not that he did not have the opportunity to put wedding clothes on; it was that he didn't think the occasion called for them. He chose to attend God's feast as he was, without God's clothes. The Father could see this was no friend at all, and His anger flared. He told His attendants, *"Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Wedding banquets are no small occasion. A lot of planning and emotion goes into them. Couples pour over the guest list to make sure no one is left out, hoping that most will respond with joy at the news

of their marriage and celebrate with them. Because the guests are so important, invitations have become big business. Tedious consideration and outrageous funds are poured into making sure the invitations match the occasion. How insulted a couple would be to go by a friend's house and find their invitation ripped up and tossed in the trash! How offended they would be to have the people closest to them pay no attention to their festival day, to have them go on with life like nothing important was happening! Sure, their so-called friends could claim to love them nonetheless, as many claim to love Christ while ignoring His day, but the fact that they could not make time to celebrate with them on their day would speak more about their true feelings than any words. How could a couple be anything but sad, angry, and confused if they put their heart and soul into their wedding banquet only to be left sitting alone in their rented hall watching the meal grow cold.

Yet how often haven't we responded to God's wedding banquet in just that way? Didn't your heart skip a beat or two when you heard the response of those invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb? This is the feast, yet how often haven't we paid no attention, going off to the field, the business, or wherever else is more important to us than Him. The Father puffs His chest out with pride, eagerly awaiting His friends to share His joy at His Son's arrival to unite Himself with His bride, the Church. Every week He calls out to the streets for guests, setting His altar with the richest fare and laying out wedding clothes of Christ's righteousness, yet few dress and feast. Just as frustrating, many who do come fail to pay attention, so that, while their bodies are here, their minds are with the others in the field, at work, or wherever else they would rather be, about as thrilled to be at the feast as a hunter at a ballet on the first day of deer season.

This is the feast, and God has intended it to be grace for all, but it can quickly become an occasion for judgment. As Luther said, *"there are always mouse droppings mixed in with the pepper."* You may be here, but you may not be God's friend. Those who will not have God's Son will not have His mercy. Christ has taken your place that you might be here, but if you will not have Christ, there is no room for you in the hall, and there are always others to take your place. No one can stand before the Father as he or she is, but only dressed with God's grace in Christ, the King's Son who came to make us royal sons and daughters as well. Are you dressed in a sin you'd rather wear than Christ? Have you stained and tattered your wedding clothes by purposefully and unrepentantly living contrary to God's will? Well, there is a place prepared for you, but it is not a place for feasting. It is the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But the Father has invited both good and bad today, and wedding garments of Christ's innocence and righteousness have been set out, free of charge, perfectly and individually fitted to cover your shame and adorn you with grace. Wash again in your Baptism and welcome the Son. Come, good and bad, sinner and saint, friend and enemy, and get dressed. Dirty and unprepared though you may be, you'll clean up well, because the Father has spared no expense. This is the feast, and, while there may be boring guests, this is anything but boring, because the Son has come to take His bride, the Church. This is the feast, and God pictures His gospel in that way in our text for good reason, because He wants men and women to flock to it, for it is a joyous occasion, a celebration of the Son's arrival and the Father's generosity. I won't critique what you wore here today, and there is no need for you to put in your two cents on my clothes, especially since I dressed myself. But I do know this: whatever you wore here, the Father will dress you with the spotless wedding clothes of Christ. And I don't know whether you came here as a friend or enemy, as good or bad, but I do know that now you are here at the Father's invitation. You are the King's guest; you are His friend through faith in Christ. This is the feast. Everything is ready. Put on your wedding clothes and rejoice. Amen.