

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of October 12, 2008*

## Spurn Not the Generosity of the King (Matthew 22:1-14)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

“Again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who have a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servant to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.’”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, on this Thanksgiving Sunday the message is very clear. It is found in the title, “Thanksgiving”. It’s a special time when we give thanks for God’s good gifts to us. It’s a time when we especially remember His generosity, how He provides our livelihood, our family, our friends, our food, our homes, and how He watches over us and protects us. Most of all it’s a time when we give thanks for the breath of life...that He’s breathed into each of us. It’s a time when we celebrate the eternal life He’s breathed into us by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments. This is a time when we give thanks for the redemption and the new life we have in our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a wonderful holiday to be sure. Many of us will have a big meal, a feast with friends or family. We feast because it’s a celebration, it’s a good time. Our Gospel text also involves a thanksgiving meal of sorts. It is a marriage feast hosted by the king for his son. The king in the story is a generous man. We can only imagine what kind of lavish feast he put on...it would have been a feast fit for a king, the best food in the land in the most beautiful palace and the king here wants to share it with anyone and everyone. So, he sends out wedding invitations but it says the invited people would not come.

Now this was no ordinary wedding, not that any wedding is ordinary for that matter. But this was the wedding of the son of the king. The king himself arranged the banquet. He sent his servants to personally invite the guests. He wanted to share the joy of the wedding with anyone who would come. The king specifically instructed his servants to tell the people invited that everything was ready; the dinner had been prepared, all they had to do was simply come and enjoy. There was no need to bring any presents because the king had prepared everything. It’s a gift.

Still the people would not come. Most people ignored the invitation while some even seized the king’s servants and treated them shamefully and killed them. This is a strange response to the king’s generosity. Normally if we were invited to the wedding of a friend we would feel honoured; we would want to go, even if we didn’t want to go we would feel compelled and we wouldn’t normally think of mistreating or killing the person

who sent the invitation. But this is what the invited people in the parable did. And even worse, they did this to the servants of the king himself. It would be as if Queen Elizabeth herself sent out invitations to feast at Buckingham Palace, and paid your airfare and arranged all your lodging free of charge. And all she asked was that we come and enjoy. It would be an honour to say the least and at no cost! Who in their right mind would kill the messengers of this generous invitation? Absurd! That goes beyond insulting!

Friends, we see here that the King wants to give. He loves to give a party and He just wants people to come. The King in the parable of course, represents God. The Son in the parable is Jesus Christ and the people invited to the wedding banquet are the whole world. The text says that those invited were not worthy. This means they did not believe. For the only thing that makes someone worthy in God's eyes is having faith in Jesus as Saviour. In other words, the worthy ones for the banquet are the ones who believe and essentially say, "That is for me".

With such a gracious invitation we dare not snub the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We see the consequence of rejecting the King in the parable. It says, "The King was angry, and He sent His troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." But thank God you are here today to hear His Word, to be built up in the Faith, you have come to receive rest for your souls as He comes to you in the Word and Sacraments, as Jesus feeds you with His Body and Blood and gives a foretaste of the Feast to come.

Friends, there is one guest at the wedding feast that is not like the others. It says, "When the King came in to look at the guests, He saw there a man who had no wedding garment." All the guests at the feast had wedding clothes but this man did not. We are not told whether the King supplied the wedding clothes or whether the people brought their own best clothes to wear at the wedding. The main point is that the man was rebellious. He was not treating this like a wedding feast. He was apparently dressed inappropriately in old, dirty clothes. Given the context of the passage it is clear that either way he refused to be dressed properly for the great wedding feast.

When the King asks him how he entered the feast without wedding clothes the man had nothing to say. That is interesting. The man's not embarrassed or ashamed or apologetic in any way. He offers no explanation. As a result, the King had the man thrown out into the outer darkness.

Friends, the point here is not simply that we should wear nice clothes to a wedding. The essential point has to do with our spiritual clothes. To come to the Heavenly Banquet, to enter eternal life you need better spiritual clothes than you naturally have. In other words, it is impossible to enter the Heavenly Feast, that is, eternal life in nothing but your natural dress, your natural fallen condition. You need heavenly clothes to enter heaven. What am I getting at here? Simply this; you need to daily put on Christ, to be clothed in the pure white robe of His righteousness that was given you in Baptism. As St. John's vision of heaven says in Revelation 7, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb".

This all comes down to repentance and faith. All our sins are like filthy rags, as Isaiah says. That is why Christ came, to atone for your sins and wash them away and make you pure in His grace. The man in the parable was not clothed properly because he had no faith and he treated the King's grace as though it were nothing. He took the King's generosity for granted and failed to recognize the magnitude of the gift.

Friends, our response to God's gifts must be one of humble gratitude. We must not let our worship in church fall into routine as something we simply do because it is something we have always done. We must not let ourselves simply go through the motions in our walk with the Lord during the week. The man without the wedding garment did not really appreciate the magnitude of the King's generosity. And his apathy was his downfall. This is a warning for believers not to begin to slide into carelessly and callously taking God's generosity and Jesus for granted. This happens when we resist the Spirit's leading to pray and to read His Word and apply it each day. We must not get too secure in our old routines. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12)

Make no mistake it is only by God's grace that you may approach Him. It is nothing good you have done that makes you worthy. In fact, any thoughtless word, any impure thought, any apathy to His grace makes you unworthy. Your worthiness is found in nothing else than the shed blood of Jesus Christ. When we come before Him in humbleness and confess our sins and want to rid ourselves of our filthy rags by the power of the Holy Spirit, He lifts us up. He says, "I forgive you. Come to the Feast thou good and faithful servant". In essence He says, "You are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus and you are pure in my sight". As we sang in the hymn of the day just now, "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress". And as we will soon sing in the hymn, Rock of Ages, "Naked come to Thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace."

And how abundant is the Lord's grace! That we want to live in it; that we want to eat it and drink it in Holy Communion; that we want to have it direct all our days and our deeds. Friends, as we wait for the Final Feast when death will be swallowed up for good, we live in repentance; we live by faith in Christ as our heavenly garment. He is your glorious dress. Go in peace; serve the Lord. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.