

Written Copy: Matthew 22:8-14 “Many Called, But Few Chosen?”

20th Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 23

Sunday, October 15th, 2023

Text: Matthew 22:8-14

⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

The text's intent

To illustrate how the reign and rule of God through Christ comes to you through the call of the Gospel, and only the work of the Spirit through the Gospel which makes Jesus' salvation work to be for you, by faith, will give you a place in the banquet that is a life lived out with Christ now and unto eternal life to come. The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day knew the call to this Messianic banquet was coming, but when it came through the Gospel Message of Christ they turned their back on it, not finding it worthy of their time, and some even reacted violently, killing those who delivered the call to them. These the Father would punish for their dishonoring His Son by refusing His gracious call, which was fulfilled in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Because they refused to come, and because the Father wants His Son's reign and rule filled with guests, He sent His Gospel call out to the four corners of the earth. Many are called. But only those who are made worthy by putting on Christ in baptismal faith, are the chosen who will enjoy the Messianic banquet now and for eternity. All who deny this baptismal faith or take it off by neglecting the Spirit's work of repentance, will suffer in eternal damnation where there will be the weeping of utter hopelessness and the gnashing of teeth in anger and agony.

Focus Statement:

Christ sends the Church out with the Gospel call to come be a part of His reign and rule in the heart by faith. Only He can make you worthy to be a part of this Messianic banquet which is life lived out in His presence now and for eternity. He takes away all that would disqualify you and gives you His right standing through baptismal faith. His work of salvation given to you in baptism guarantees you a place with Him now at His table and for eternity in the Feast which has no end. All who believe in Christ are chosen by the Spirit through the Gospel.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

What does Jesus mean that many are called but few are chosen? All are called by Gospel Message. But those who find no use for it, those who actively stand against it, those who think they are worthy without the right standing it brings; all these will suffer forever apart from the presence of God in the outer darkness of eternal suffering where there is the weeping of utter hopelessness and the gnashing of teeth in agony and anger. Only those who believe are chosen. Nobody chooses on their own.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Treasure the call He gives by the Gospel and in Baptism. Believe you are the Chosen as evidenced by your faith. Work with the Spirit to keep His robe of righteousness on by repentant faith. Be a part of passing along that gracious call through sharing the Gospel.

Subject Sentence: Gospel Call to all, the chosen believe by faith

Introduction

There was once a mother who planned an extravagant Thanksgiving Dinner. She usually only cooked for her immediate family and the in-laws. But she wanted this Thanksgiving Celebration to be something special, so she invited friends from Church. She invited around 40 people, thinking probably wouldn't come, but lo and behold they all showed up. As dinner was about to begin, she asked her six-year-old daughter to pray and say the blessing. Her daughter wasn't really fond of the idea and said to her mom, "I don't know what to say!" Her mother replied, "Just say what you hear mommy say." So, the little girl bowed her head, and with a serious voice, and slightly pained expression on her face, said, "O Lord; why on earth did I invite all these people?"

Imagine you are hosting a big dinner party. Maybe it's thanksgiving, maybe it's a wedding banquet for your son or daughter. And you invited a large number of people to make this occasion a special one. In fact, you invited more people than you originally planned on, so you had to put in the extra time to make sure there is enough food. Or perhaps you have it catered and spared no expense with the quantity and the quality of what was served. It cost you an arm and a leg, but you wanted this to be an occasion to be remembered for a long time. It is your gift of love to all. And then, when the day came, out of all those people you invited and planned for, no one showed up. You had sent out save the date reminders well beforehand, but that didn't seem to matter. When you asked them why they didn't come some gave the lamest of excuses, like "Something just came up", or "I needed to get the leaves raked", or "I just wasn't feeling good". That last one at first sounded genuine, until you heard from someone else that they were actually well enough to go to the football game on that day, or to the house of another friend. How would that make you feel? How hurt would you be that no one wanted to come after all the work and money you put into it? How angry would you be at those who stood you up?

Parable of the Wedding Feast: Part One

Welcome to the Parable of the Wedding Feast, where the King throws an extravagant wedding feast for his son. The first part of this Parable describes how when the day comes, he sends his servants out to gather all the people to the banquet hall, but no one comes. He would've sent a "Save the date" message out well beforehand and expected his subjects to show their love and loyalty to him by clearing their schedule on this special day. This is not just dinner at a friend's house. This is the king, and it would've been a great honor to be invited. They've would've been expected to go. The day comes and all has been prepared. There is more than enough food and the king has spared no expense to provide the best fare. Because this is an afternoon dinner, the expectation would be that it would stretch out the rest of the day. It would be the kind of thing they could eat, relax, play some games, and come back and eat more.

Yet when His servants go out and call his subjects to come, they refuse. Many are just not interested in this banquet. They have more important things to do in their life. They rudely refuse and turn away from the servants. Others take great offense at this invitation, at the expectation of the king that they drop everything and come. These mistreat his servants and show extreme disrespect to them, including attacking them and killing them. Remember from last week that Jesus parables are stories from real life, but they contain head-scratching moments that were intended to make the audience take notice. And this is one of them, where invited subjects not only refuse to come, but react rudely and violently to the servants sent to call them.

In this parable the king is God the Father, the son is the Son of God Jesus Christ, and the wedding banquet is a word picture for the gracious reign and rule of Jesus that brings into the lives of all who believe all the gifts we have through faith in Him. And who are these subjects that refuse to come? Initially it is the religious leaders: the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, the elders and the scribes. All those who had read and knew of the coming of the Messiah, heard the invitation in the Scriptures, but wanted no part of the Messiah the Father sent or His message He proclaimed. They took offense not only at Him, but the message He would send His apostles to preach after His death and resurrection. These religious leaders actively sought to destroy His Church and thereby destroy the Gospel call to faith in Him, the means by which Jesus' establishes His reign and rule in hearts and minds of those called.

While these religious leaders are the initial target of His warning, it can be expanded to all in our day who ignore the Gospel call to faith. Those who hear it but judge it as being unimportant for them, not worth their time, or useless and silly in this modern day and age. It would include all who actively stand against the preaching of the Gospel and try to stop it and destroy the Church. And we are left to scratch our heads at times, knowing what a wonderful gift is being given in the Gospel, why anyone would react this way.

At first blush the king's reaction may seem extreme to us. But consider, this is their king who is calling them. He expects them to come. He has spared no expense to make this a day to remember, and they by their actions they have shown great dishonor to him and to his son. They knew about this ahead of time, but now just can't be bothered, and are even offended that he would be calling them! Their refusal of his call and the offense that it shows is what moves the king to anger so great that he sends his armies and destroys them.

Jesus is warning these religious leaders that by their passive and active refusal of His gracious call to be a part of His reign and rule by faith means they will see the Father's wrath. This was fulfilled around 40 years later when the Romans would swoop down and destroy Jerusalem and the temple, which would never be rebuilt. At the same time Jesus is warning all those in our day and age who either ignore or actively oppose His Gospel call that they too will suffer eternal destruction. The Gospel call has gone out since Pentecost, but many will refuse it, and they will suffer God's eternal wrath for that.

Parable of the Wedding Feast: Part Two

In the second part of this Parable, the next thing we hear the king do is another head-scratching moment. The king instructs His servants to go out into the main roads and byways outside the city and invite all the people they encounter. It doesn't matter if they are rich or poor, law abiding or law-breaking, good people or evil people. His banquet is ready, and he wants his banquet hall filled. Those he originally invited showed their unworthiness by their actions. So now he takes his call to come outside his kingdom.

Here Jesus is describing the work of His Church. By and large the Jewish nation refused His gracious call to believe in Him as Messiah: Lord and Savior. So, He sent His Church out into the world, to the Gentiles, out into all four corners of the world. We are to preach the Gospel to all people: those we judge to be worthy and good, as well as those we judge to be unworthy, living evil lives doing evil things. That's because in God's eyes no one is worthy of such a wonderful gift that is faith in Christ. But our God's heart desire is that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the Gospel truth. Jesus died to forgive all people and rose again so that all might obtain eternal life. And our God wants all people to know about it. Many are called by the Gospel Message, in fact all mankind is called.

In Jesus parable we flash forward to the banquet hall where the feast is about to begin. The hall is filled to capacity. But when the king comes in to start the festivities, he notices one man who is not wearing the wedding garment that was given as a part of the call to come to the banquet. You might wonder why anyone would need a special garment. But keep in mind the call to come went out to all people; people that were going about their everyday lives and were not prepared to come and attend such a lavish banquet. People who would otherwise be dressed inappropriately or with dirty work clothes. People who could not afford the fancy attire appropriate for such a banquet. To show up in regular street clothes or work clothes would not honor the king or his son at such an occasion as this. So special clothing was handed out and put on all before they entered the banquet. With this in mind we have another head-scratching moment; why isn't this man wearing the wedding garment given to him? And if it was put on him, why would he take it off? The king himself asks the man these questions but he has no answer, because there is no excuse for his action. None at all.

At this point we need to ask, “What does the wedding garment symbolize?” It symbolizes the right standing we are given through the Gospel Message as the gift of grace from Jesus Christ. It is the gift you received in baptism where Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection was given to you personally. It is the washing away of the filth that you spread all over yourself by your disobedient and sinful thoughts, words, and actions. Through your baptism you stand before God now and in the eternity to come washed clean of sin. You are given the right standing that Jesus won for you through His life of perfect obedience. And He takes from you all your sin. This is delivered by the Spirit through the water and the Word. And it is renewed in your heart and mind whenever the Gospel is preached, read, or sung. You didn’t earn it or deserve it. It is the gracious and loving gift of the Father who wants you to be in His presence now and for all eternity.

If all this was given as His gracious gift, free of charge, why would anyone refuse it? Why would anyone carelessly take this gift off and cast it aside by disconnecting themselves from the Word and Sacrament through which the Spirit keeps them robed in Christ’s righteousness? While they may have plenty of excuses that seem valid in their heads such as: life just got so busy, or I can worship God wherever, I don’t need to come into His presence, or I’m basically a good person, God will let me slide through on the Last Day. But when these people stand before Christ on Judgement Day, all excuses fall silent. They will have nothing to say. They will have no defense to make as they are cast away from Jesus’ presence where their eternity will be the spiritual darkness and affliction of eternal torment. Their eternity will not be partying with all the sinners but will be filled with the weeping of utter hopelessness and the gnashing of teeth that comes from pain and anger. And it is forever.

The Future of You Who Were Called and Chosen.

But that is not your future, you who hold fast in faith to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You were called to that faith by the Spirit working in the Gospel. He called you and chose you to be a part of Jesus’ reign and rule here in His Church. You didn’t choose Him, He chose you. And He continues to choose you every time you are moved to ask forgiveness of your sins and by faith hold fast to the Gospel of Jesus’ forgiveness. That is how you can know you are one of the Chosen, because you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Who are those called? All mankind is called by the Gospel. Who are the Chosen? Outside of ourselves, you and I do not know for sure who they are or will be. Only God does. The Chosen are those who believe in Jesus Christ through baptismal faith and die in that faith. They are the ones who kept that faith alive by making use of the means of grace: God’s word and Sacraments. They are the ones who join in the celebration of foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Jesus’ body and blood that is the Sacrament of the Altar. You are the called and the chosen who will celebrate that unbelievable feast that is eternal with Jesus and all who die in faith.

Conclusion

Just as you would desire all who you invite to a banquet to come and enjoy what you worked so hard to prepare, God desires all mankind to join Him in eternal life that is the marriage feast of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, in His reign and rule now and into eternal life. Jesus gave the greatest price, His very life, so that you could live with Him now, receiving His wondrous gifts of forgiveness of sins, salvation from the devil's grasp, and the sure and certain promise of eternal life to come. And that eternity will be better than the most extravagant banquet you could imagine here on earth. It's the place where there is no more sickness, no more tears, and no more death. He called and chose you to join Him even though you weren't worthy of it. He made you worthy of it through His life, death, and resurrection given to you for free, as His gift of grace. It's the gift that surpasses all understanding. It's the place where you and I will live with a joy and peace that is beyond our ability to comprehend this side of eternity. And the Father will never say, "Why did I call all these people? Why did I call you?" He chose you before you were born, worked to make sure your parents brought you to the baptismal font, where His Spirit called and chose you in your baptism. O you who are called and chosen, make use of His means of grace, so that you are wearing His wedding garment of right standing now, and all the way until the Last Day, when His eternal banquet begins. And for you, and I, and all who believe, it will never end. Amen.