

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
Matthew 22:1-14

Today, Jesus shows us both the severity of God and the grace of God.

In the parable, wedding and wedding feast are interchangeable. You don't have a wedding without the wedding feast, especially in the time of the New Testament. God the Father has prepared the wedding feast for His Son and His bride, the church. Thousands upon thousands of sacrificial animals have been slain in preparation for the wedding feast. Even the unblemished lamb of God was slain on the cross for the feast. The invitation for the feast had gone out to the Israelites. The promise given to Abraham by God was preserved in the people of Israel and their sacred writings until His Christ should come into the flesh to announce that the wedding feast was at hand. The people who had already been invited ignored the feast and even killed the messengers including the very Messiah sent by God. As foretold by the prophet Isaiah, the invitation for the wedding feast then goes to all nations. It has already gone out to all nations and continues to go out to all nations. In this we see the grace of God. And all the wedding guests are given a wedding garment for the occasion. And if you attend the wedding feast without the provided wedding garment, you see the severity of God. Those with their own garment are bound hand and foot and cast out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and mashing of teeth!

So, you must have a wedding garment. And you can't bring your own. This isn't like your cousin's wedding in the country. This is a King's wedding! He provides the garments. It's the most exquisite garment you can imagine and even more so. It is made from the wool of the spotless Lamb of God who suffered and died a horrendous death on the cross. And it is made white by being washed in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb of God is spotless and had no need of Baptism but consented to Baptism for righteousness' sake. Your righteousness! I love the practice of some of the ancient churches.

The baptism font was a pool with steps going down on one side and steps going up on the other side. You would enter the water buck naked and then be baptized. As you stepped out of the cleansing waters, you are wrapped in a white robe signifying the spotless wedding garment you receive in baptism. For propriety's sake, the priest was behind a screen when women were baptized and only her female family was with her. I love the way some in the early church baptized because it modeled so well Paul's description of baptism in Romans:

"We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4)

The white robe signified that you have newness of life now and not just when Christ comes back to lead you to the wedding feast at the end of time. You must have this wedding garment you received in baptism, or you will be cast into the outer darkness. The severity of God is seen in the fact that He will only accept the perfect righteousness of His Son. Your righteousness is as filthy rags and can never suffice for entry into the wedding. God will accept nothing except perfect righteousness. Jesus earned this righteousness by His perfect life and by submitting Himself to death and the full wrath of His Father on the cross. But the grace of God is shown in this way. The wedding garment of Christ's perfect righteousness is given to you as a gift. You cannot buy it or steal it or earn it by birthright or effort. This is one of the reasons why infant baptism is so beautiful. An infant is brought to the baptismal font by his parents and the gift of the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit and faith are given as pure gift. But these gifts are given no matter what age you are baptized.

Your wedding garment, like any garment, can become stained. It becomes stained with your sin. This is why Paul warns us in our Epistle reading today to "look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15-16)

You are surrounded by evil and you even have evil inside of you in your old man. This evil can hurt you. It can entice you to sin and stain your wedding garment. This has befallen every Christian who has ever lived. It's an important question to ask what happens when you fall from your baptism. I hope you notice that when I bless our young confirmands at the altar, I say, "God bless you and keep you in your baptismal grace." This is important stuff. The answer cannot be that you return to your baptism through works. You don't earn your wedding garment with works, and you cannot clean it with works. What work that you or I do could ever be good enough? Penance be damned. Literally! Your baptismal garment must be cleaned in the blood of the Lamb, that is, through the forgiveness of sins. Thanks be to God, He gave the authority to forgive sins to men, as we heard last week. We must come to the place where forgiveness is found, that is remembering your baptism, receiving holy absolution, hearing the preaching of the word of God, and eating and drinking the Lord's Supper. Done in faith, these gifts serve as a refuge from a world filled with evil.

Now I find something really interesting in this parable. The "servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good!" (v. 10) But only one was without a wedding garment. Now we know that no one is good except God alone, and I believe Jesus has in mind here "good and bad" as viewed in the world. In the eyes of the world the church is full of good and bad people. I think you know what I mean. You see some Christians that take their piety seriously and have lived quiet, peaceful lives. You see other Christians that don't seem to give much thought to piety. Yet their master is Christ and not me or you. For example, the rich young man, who we think is St. Mark, was viewed as a "good" person in the eyes of the world. St. Matthew, the tax collector, was seen as a "bad" person in the eyes of the world. Yet Jesus sees them both as His own! It is the same with you. No matter how the world sees you; as bad or good, or as a success or a failure, your Lord sees you as His little lamb. You are bought and paid for by Jesus' blood. You are covered in His righteousness in your baptism through faith! This is what you look to for assurance that you are saved.

If you look at your works, you will never be satisfied that your salvation is guaranteed. Your works are necessary and serve your neighbor with the love of Christ, but they aren't necessary for salvation and play no part in it. When you are troubled by your sin or about the state of your salvation, listen to the promises of the Lord in Isaiah:

Come, every one who thirsts,  
Come to the waters;  
And he who has no money,  
Come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
Incline your ear, and come to Me;  
hear that your soul may live;  
and I will make with you and everlasting covenant,  
My steadfast, sure love for David...  
Seek the LORD while He may be found;  
call upon Him while He is near;  
let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
Let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. (Is. 55:1 – 3, 7)

The Lord has prepared a feast for you today. He is the Host and the meal. It is a meal of forgiveness that washes your baptismal garment in the blood of the Lamb. And it's a foretaste of the great wedding feast when Christ, the King, comes and rescues His bride from this wicked world. What a wonderful day that will be! Come. Taste and see that the Lord is Good!

To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.