

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23A)

October 15, 2017

Text: Matthew 22:1–14

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's appointed readings are a veritable treasure trove of joy and gladness. A feast of rich food and well-aged wine without the ominous specter of death is described in the OT reading. Paul, in the epistle reading, calls us to rejoice always with exceeding joy while always thinking about everything that is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praise worthy. And then the Lord Jesus tells the parable of wedding feast in which we learn that the kingdom of God is like the celebration associated with the royal wedding feast arranged by the king for his son, the prince.

The kingdom of God – the Church of the Lord Jesus – is not some somber assembly of dour sourpusses begrudging the least hint of joy and happiness. Quite the contrary, the Church, God's Kingdom on earth, is described as a time of singing, play, music, dancing, feasting, drinking, and all around good spirits. Today's inspired readings, especially the Lord's parable of the wedding feast, teach us that the saving gospel is a proclamation of love and joy, a truly joyous wedding celebration where Christ is the bridegroom and the Christian Church is the bride (Luther, House Postils, v. 7, p. 107).

Consider how Jesus describes His kingdom of grace, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the feast..." (vs. 2–3). God the Father is the king who prepares a wedding feast for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His beloved bride, the holy Christian Church made up of believers from all human history. This is the marriage feast of all marriage feasts. It's royal, divinely royal.

Can't you just imagine all the splendor and glory of such an occasion? No expense is spared. The food and drink are the finest. The music the most glorious. The décor the most lavish. The guest list the most extensive. Dear saints, let your imagination enjoy the splendor. For this is God's kingdom of grace and mercy established through the gospel of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This gospel of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners like you and me is the joy of heaven and earth. The apostle Peter writes (1:12) that even the angels in heaven

long to look into this good news of the Son's marriage to the Church. Jesus Himself said (Lk 15) there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents and joins the wedding feast as a member of the Church, His beloved Bride.

“This royal wedding is Christ's gracious (kingdom), where there is sumptuous food and drink, comforting proclamation, genuine joy, and everlasting bliss; where the poor sinner finds redemption from death, where the sorrowful are comforted, and there are glad tidings, singing, praising, and giving of thanks” (Luther, p. 108). Listen to this tapestry of Biblical references that describe our Lord's gospel, the saving gospel whereby we are made children of God and participants in Christ's wedding feast.

This gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:8), the glory of Christ (II Cor. 4:4); Paul expands that phrase in I Timothy 1:11 to the gospel is the glory of the blessed God. This message of joy is called the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:3), the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), the word of truth (Col. 1:5), the gospel of God and of Christ in (I Thess. 2:9 & I Thess. 3:2. Finally, the apostle John describes this salvation as the eternal gospel in Revelation 14:6. In other words, the Bible spares now words to describe what is given to us each and every Sunday! In actuality, every moment of our lives. The Gospel is God's power, His glory, His peace, His truth, His eternal revelation of His love for this world, for you and me. This is why we rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4).

The Father's invitation to the wedding feast goes forth from Christ's Church day after day, year after year. The servants are sent out to call those invited to the wedding feast. Vs. 3 gives a warning, however, “but they would not come.” The invitation was ignored. Oh, the reasons were good and reasonable. According to vs. 5, some went to work on the farm. Work there never really stops. Others asked to be excused to take care of other forms of business. Other simply grew tired of the invitations altogether and had the messengers shamefully treated and killed (vs. 6). To be sure, Jesus is describing the sad history of OT Israel. By and large, God's people rejected the invitations more often than not.

But this parable isn't simply about the past. It applies today too. Incredibly, many still say no to God's invitation to come to His Son's wedding feast. The excuses are pretty much the same. Too busy, there's not enough time. Other priorities must be attended to first. Please have me excused from the feast that is offered week after week in Christ's churches. Maybe in the years to come, when life is slower, then I'll be able to feast with Jesus at His wedding table. Excuses are given, but they ring hollow

compared to magnitude of the feast offered. Some are more hostile in their antagonism. In some places in the world, Christians are killed for inviting people to Jesus' feast.

The king responds to the rejection with anger. According to vs. 7, the troops are sent in, the murderers are destroyed, and the city is burned. For Jesus' original audience – the scribes and elders of Israel – this parable is both a historical commentary on Israel's past and a prophetic warning of things to come. In 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The Jewish leaders never came to the wedding feast of salvation offered by Jesus.

It is here that we 21st century Christians need to pay all the more attention. The rejection of the Father's invitation to the wedding feast results in God's wrath. Despising God's Word is a damnable sin even if it appears to go unpunished for a while. Too easily do we allow the things of this world, the cares of this life, and the desires for earthly comforts to distract us from the true and eternal joy that God the Father wants to give to us. The reasons given for not receiving the gospel in preached words and sacraments sound so reasonable. Life is busy; demands must be met; bills must be paid; people must be tended to. Yes. All of that is true and your Father in heaven knows you need these things. But our Father also knows you need the eternal things. And He desires to give them to you in abundance generously seasoned with joy and thanksgiving. Saints of God, heed the call to come to the wedding feast.

History has shown again and again that the Lord brings His judgment against people for despising His Word. We see it in OT Israel. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. for rejecting Jesus. Martin Luther feared for his German nation saying time and time again that the piper must be paid for his people's unthankful reception of the pure gospel. From what I understand, it's hard to hear the pure gospel preached from the pulpit Luther preached from in Wittenberg, Germany. The Church is shrinking, numerically in America. The question Jesus asked in Luke 18:8 is haunting, "Will he find faith on earth?" We must heed the warnings of Holy Scripture and the lessons of history. Let us hear the gospel call while it is today, lest it be taken away due to our unthankfulness and inattention.

In the today's parable, servants are sent out even after the king destroyed the city of the murderers (vs. 7). This time they are sent out into every nook and cranny. Bring them all in to my Son's wedding feast for the joy of my Son's wedding will be shared with everyone. This is the description of the Church's ministry since the death,

resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus to the Father's right hand. This is our time to call people into the wedding celebration.

But the parable contains a second warning. For the king came to the filled wedding hall and found a man "who had no wedding garment" (vs. 11). You see, not only does God the Father provide the richest food, He provides the best clothing too. But a man refused the Father's gift. Even in Christ's Church, there can be rebellion and stubborn pride which refuses to receive the gifts of the Father.

According to vs. 13, the one who refused the Father's wedding garment is bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Beware, dear saints of God. Cast not aside the gifts the Father desires to give.

Let us bestir ourselves, obey, and follow our beloved Lord who calls to us so tenderly and lovingly. He wishes to invite us to this joyous wedding feast. Therefore, let us come to the wedding and not despise the invitation. Then let us also apply ourselves, that each one performs what is his duty to do. If we do that, we shall be of good cheer. If we suffer for faithfulness to God's Word and name, it's all to the good. Our Lord's joyous invitation should comfort and motivate us all the more to hear and learn God's Word gladly, to feed our souls daily at this divine banquet, so that we do not disdain the Lord's invitation. Let us be careful not to fall into the devil's den of ingratitude. May our dear Lord grant us His Holy Spirit that we may learn to cling tightly and joyously to these things, truly believe, lead a Christian life, and ever be found wearing the proper wedding garment (paraphrase of Luther, p. 116).

✠ 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, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.