

10/9/11

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. The text is the parable of the Wedding Reception, Mt 22:1-14, and I'll quote it as we go.

Jesus said, ... "The kingdom of Heaven is like a king who arranged a marriage for his son and sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding. But they didn't want to come.

So he sent out other servants with orders to tell those who were invited, 'Listen! My banquet is served! My fed oxen have been butchered and everything is ready! Come to the Feast!' But they ignored it, and went off, one to his farm and another to his business, while the rest took hold of the king's servants and committed outrages against them and killed them. And the king was outraged and sent his soldiers and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he told his servants, 'The wedding feast is served, but those who were invited weren't fit. So go out on the main roads and invite as many as you find to the wedding.' So they went out on the streets and gathered everybody they found, good and bad, till the wedding hall was filled, with guests at the tables.

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw a man there who wasn't wearing wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how is it you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was speechless. Then the king told the servants, 'Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him out in the dark. There will be crying and gritted teeth.' Because many are invited, but few are chosen."

Without repentance, there's no forgiveness. But it's easy to get confused about that, partly because Satan tells us that repenting means walking around with all our sins piled on us and saying, "Lord, I'm gross, I'm gross, I'm sorry I'm so gross." Till, he hopes, we follow Judas into spiritual suicide. In a lesser version of that, when there's some disobedience we're holding on to, we slap our hands and say, "Bad! Bad!" But you notice we've still got our grip on that disobedience. You see, we *also* get confused about repentance because a part of us *wants* to be confused about it, so that instead of actually repenting, we just say "Sorry," meaning, "Sorry You don't like this, Lord, because it's what I'm going to do." As if the guy without wedding clothes had said, "Sorry You don't like this outfit, because it's what I'm going to wear." No. Repenting means turning *from* the sin *to* Jesus who forgives.

But first, it's surprising how few people realize that if you went to a wedding reception during the Italian Renaissance, you were supposed to bring your own knife and fork. Really. If a host had provided all the silverware for everybody they'd have been amazed at the extravagance. These days, of course, if you're invited to dinner – word to the wise – don't bring your own silverware. Because it'd be weird, and actually insulting. "I brought my own." Like coming to God with your own goodness: "I brought my own." On the other hand, when you're invited to dinner, *do* bring your own *clothes*. That's *our* custom. Which is why *we're* amazed at the extravagant custom of 1st Century Judea, where, if a rich man invited you to a wedding reception, you weren't supposed to bring your own clothes. Not that you showed up naked, but not in anything special. It was a way of honoring your host by admitting you've got nothing fit for so grand an occasion. So what, then? Did everybody sit around in grungies?

No, wearing grungies everywhere to show that we honor nothing but our own comfort, is a modern custom. And when I find whoever started it – POW!

No. In the 1st Century, you came in nothing special and then you changed into extravagant WEDDING CLOTHES *provided by the host* and waiting for you in the lobby as you came in, so that you could walk on in, looking fabulous. Putting on those robes was part of the celebration. I think it was a brilliant custom, especially if, like the Lord Jesus, you've got a lot of friends with bad taste, who'll wear anything if we can get into it? and there's no telling what we'll get into? And it's most especially brilliant if, like the Lord Jesus, you've got a lot of really *poor* friends who really *don't* have anything fit to wear in front of Him, but you still want them to walk in looking fabulous.

To walk in to what? To a Banquet where *all* the water's been turned into wine, to a Feast, forgiveness of all sins included, with eternal life, FULLNESS OF JOY AND ETERNAL PLEASURES AT His RIGHT HAND, *and* resurrection from the dead, all expenses paid. It starts here and now, in the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN in this world by the Word of *God*, the Sacraments of *God*, and the Spirit of *God*. The first course is already being served, and I'll tell you, if knowing Jesus now – if this is the fruit cup, what's the main course going to be like? Jesus says V. 1] “It's LIKE A KING has ARRANGED A MARRIAGE FOR HIS SON AND SENT OUT HIS SERVANTS TO SUMMON THE ONES WHO WERE INVITED. It's like this KING has got this huge happiness in his private life and He wants you in on it. Because the Holy Father, Holy Son, and Holy Spirit *do* have this huge happiness in Their private life and we're invited – into things NO EYE HAS SEEN, NO EAR HAS HEARD, things that HAVE NEVER ENTERED THE MIND OF MAN. And since He's the Host, and very, very rich, V. 4] EVERYTHING IS READY. What can you bring? Bring yourself.

But what have we got to wear? He's here *now*. How do we come into His presence here without the roof falling in? AND WHO SHALL STAND IN HIS HOLY PLACE? He already *told* us that even OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS – even the best things about us – they're RAGS that aren't fit to wear in front of Him. And as for all the worst things about us – We've got to change into better clothes.

And it's all part of the celebration, since what God has got ready for me to wear really is extravagant. God has provided *His own Son's most holy life and His own Son's holy death* for you to wear, dressed like Christ as if you had lived His life and died His death. And it's *way* too good for me but God says, “Put it on!” It was *made* for me, because God knows that left to myself I am dirt-poor spiritually, *and* that I've got some really bad taste for some things I get into.

God knows, and He still wants us looking fabulous, fabulous enough to fit in with Him; fabulous enough to belong with Him, here and in Heaven. It's like inviting the prodigal son: “Come as you are - and then put on a robe and a ring for the party.” PUT OFF what *you've* done and PUT ON what Jesus did *for* you. That's repenting. Off with the grunge, on with the gorgeous, ready to celebrate. And you never wear it out because HIS MERCIES ARE NEW EVERY MORNING. Every day RENOUNCE whatever sins – like you don't even *know* them anymore. Repenting really *is* part of the celebration: Slip out of whatever we've gotten into – as if it were allowed. It is! – and PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Slip into RIGHTEOUSNESS that's not your own, RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD, in which, if we will just put it on, as in, “LORD, I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF” we will never be told to leave. Whereas if we stay in our own stuff –THE KING IS COMING IN THE CLOUDS WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY. If we insist on keeping whatever sin, then when THE KING COMES IN, He'll tell His angels, V. 13] TIE them UP AND THROW them OUT.

The reality is bigger than the parable: I mean, I've never seen anybody tied up and thrown out of a wedding reception in Massachusetts. In Maine, maybe. But at *any* earthly reception, it's not as though, whatever the venue, outside it's all howling darkness. But when THE KING COMES, His KINGDOM that's all but hidden in the world – this venue will suddenly become *enormous*. There'll be nothing *but* “Thine the River, Thine the tree, then the Lamb eternally; Thine the splendor, Thine the brightness, only Thee, only Thee!” – and outside, nothing but a small, dark prison with tiny, shriveled inmates, V. 13] TIED HAND AND FOOT and CRYING IN THE DARK with GRITTED TEETH.

Change up. In the parable, V. 10] WHEN THE BANQUET HALL WAS FILLED WITH GUESTS THE KING CAME IN TO SEE His friends all looking *so fabulous* – and then, V. 11] HE SAW A MAN THERE WHO WASN'T WEARING WEDDING CLOTHES. In reality, the BANQUET HALL isn't filled up yet. People are still coming into God's KINGDOM all around us. I'm here. You're here. The King is on His way. Have you changed?

I *don't* mean “are you improved”? Yes, for sure, if we drop our rags, Christ will change us inside while wear His robes. It's supernatural. But He's not talking here about the change inside. And, anyway, you can't take off what's inside. So I'm not asking, “Are we still sinful?” We are. I'm asking, “Are we still *in* our sins?” Which means something particular. It's not when you *don't* do right; it when you just *won't*. It's not when you sin; it's when you will not drop it. It's not sinning. It's *planning* to sin. I cannot tell Him, “This is what I like; get used to it.” When He comes, He must not find me insulting Him. Whatever the sin, drop it.

And I can tell you, I *do* drop it, but sometimes it bounces right back up like a rubber ball. You too? I know, but there's a difference between a ball and a yo-yo. With a yo-yo, you intend to get it back so what I'm asking is, are you keeping the string on your finger? Whatever sin it is – gambling or gossiping, being jealous of somebody or refusing to forgive somebody, being stingy or being sexually impure, dodging devotions, or finding out who can *text* the crudest – or the cruelest or the coolest. With a yo-yo, you're *planning* on getting it back, but the Holy Ghost says, “Children! MAKE NO PLANS TO SATISFY THE SINFUL NATURE – you stay with Christ and the SINFUL NATURE's not going to be *around* that long. We've got to take the string off our finger, even if it hurts. You need room on that finger for a ring.

But as Jesus says, V. 14] MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN. Does that mean that many are invited but few are really wanted? NO. It means many are invited, but few can be bothered. Some can't be bothered to come. And *some* can't be bothered to get changed. Why? Sometimes we think that our sin makes us look good and it does – good enough to eat and THE DEVIL is *LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO DEVOUR*. Take it off. Somebody says, “I'm comfortable like this!” Which is another thing to repent of. The Holy Spirit says that sin is like VOMIT. How bad has it *gotten*, that I can be comfortable in VOMIT? Take it off. Somebody says, “I gotta be me!” But by God's grace, we *don't* have to be what we've been; we don't have to be what we *think* we are. We don't have to be what Satan *says* we are. You can become the real *you*. And step one is taking off the sin costume.

V. 12] THE KING asked HIM, “FRIEND, HOW IS IT YOU CAME IN HERE WITHOUT WEDDING CLOTHES?” Why aren't you ready to celebrate? BUT HE WAS SPEECHLESS. He

couldn't say, "I didn't know there *was* a robe for me." He passed right by it. He *didn't* say, "I couldn't get out of this!" He didn't *want* to. If he'd *wanted* to get out of it and just couldn't, I tell you, the King Himself would gone out to the lobby to get him and washed him and robed him and led him in by the hand. That is the story of my life. So how does anybody come in, insulting it all, in grunge?

Well, if that man was ever nervous about the King coming, he got over it. If he had a conscience, he got over it. If he had a heart, he got over it. If he had a brain, he got it over it. God help us, we get over it and then unrepented sin turns mortal and if we ever were bothered, we're not bothered anymore. The Holy Spirit says, MINDS go DARK; HEARTS get SO HARD IT makes THEM IGNORANT. He says they lose ALL SENSITIVITY. Until that man could go to a royal wedding, with everybody robed in splendid robes, and him sitting there cool as a corpse in grunge. Oblivious. Or maybe even feeling superior toward the others who're acting like it's this big *deal*? The KING SAW him and said to him, FRIEND, FRIEND, *HOW ... ?* And then the KING SAID, "TIE HIM UP HAND AND FOOT AND THROW HIM OUT."

Beloved, OUR SALVATION IS NEARER NOW THAN WHEN WE FIRST BELIEVED. THE NIGHT IS NEARLY OVER! THE DAY IS ALMOST HERE! SO LET US PUT OFF THE DEEDS THAT ARE DONE IN THE DARK. Take off our sin and throw it away, as if it weren't even ours at all. Because God has already said, "No. That's My Son's sin."

God already LAID ON HIM all human grunge. Whatever you or I have gotten into, Christ already put it *on*. He wore it on the Cross. BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD dressed up like me. Look at Him wearing that sin that's hurt you. Look at Him nailed hand and foot, pinned hand and foot, TIED HAND AND FOOT in the DARK and CRYING, WITH GRITTED TEETH instead of you and instead of me. He *loves* us. He wore our sin so we don't *have* to wear it. So we can TAKE OFF THE SINS THAT SO EASILY ENTANGLE AND RUN! Somebody says, "But they just grow back from inside!" I know. So do your fingernails. But just because we grow them doesn't mean we've got to keep them. *Just because we grow them doesn't mean we've got to keep them.* Whatever it is and no matter how many times we've gotten into it: Get out of that grunge. Step into the shower. Your Baptism's still running and your robe's still here. Because the FEAST is still on, and you are still invited.

And I know, as I say, that lots of people can't be bothered to come, can't be bothered to change, can't be bothered. But you don't have that option. Because the Holy Ghost has already bothered you. So consider yourself CHOSEN. Jesus *said*, WHOEVER COMES TO ME, I'LL NEVER TURN AWAY. And it's as simple as, "Lord, I do repent; help me repent. Forgive me." And in that instant, BEHOLD, THOU ART FAIR; THERE IS NO STAIN IN THEE. YOU HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELF WITH CHRIST, with CLEAN HANDS AND A PURE HEART, namely His, to ASCEND THE HILL OF THE LORD right here, and TO STAND IN HIS HOLY PLACE forever and dance at the reception. See, He knows we haven't got anything fit to wear, but He still wants to watch us walk in on infinite pleasures and fullness of joy looking fabulous, looking like the Son of God. Amen.