

**The Third Sunday in Angels' Tide, October 15, 2023**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

**Called, Chosen, and Feasting**

Matthew 22:1–14

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

*Eph 1:2*


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**<sup>8</sup>Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' <sup>10</sup>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. (vv 8–10)**

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Another week, another parable from Jesus. It started with two sons. The first said he wouldn't work in the vineyard, and then he did. The second said he would work, and then he didn't. Last Sunday's parable went further: the vineyard owner's son was thrown out and killed by wicked tenants, but the "stone" that had been rejected became the cornerstone.

Now the Son is back, alive again . . . and getting married! Jesus said, **"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 wedding feast"** (vv 2–3). A parable about a wedding feast with a bride and a groom may seem a bit outdated. Why not just hook-up, like the world does, or live together first? Why a groom and a bride? What about all that "love is love" stuff?

The Bible is clear: marriage begins in the Garden of Eden with one man and one woman. From their union springs the entire human race. Jesus Himself celebrates marriage by changing water into wine at Cana's wedding feast. St. Paul commends marriage to us as good and honorable. In fact, marriage even points beyond this life to the life of the world to come. The last pages of the Bible describe great joy, **for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready** (Rev 19:7).

Who is this Bridegroom, this Son of the King? He's the Lamb who was slain in sacrifice—slain to rescue His bride! but who now stands in the middle of His Father's throne, alive forevermore. He's the Crucified One. From the wound in His side flow water and blood, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, and by these His bride is created. Jesus the Son has risen again to wed this bride, the Church.

So the servants call those who are invited to the feast. It's not a "save the date" sort of invitation but a "come, now, for the wedding feast is about to begin!" You've heard the invitation. You've come. That's why you're here, right now, today, here in this wedding hall, ready for the feast and waiting for the bridegroom to appear in glory. He's coming soon.

But how did we get here? "**Many are called,**" Jesus says, "**but few are chosen**" (v 14). There's a mystery in this. Why some, and not others? Why me? It's not like we were the only ones invited. The king sends his servants to announce the feast far-and-wide. But those invited **wouldn't come** (v. 3). Others pay **no attention and go off, one to his farm, another to his business** (v. 4). They treat the bridegroom like dirt. Time and money have their full attention. They're consumed with the concerns of Monday morning. That's what matters to them. They care only about today, not what happens in the end. Even worse are those who seize the servants, treat them shamefully, and kill them (v 6).

Why don't all who hear believe? The invitation they receive is real and genuine. There's nothing fake about it. It's not like the king, our God, was pretending when He invited them to come. He truly wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth! Preaching and God's word aren't by limited invitation or only for a select few. They're for all, universal, for those of every nation, for all tribes, people, and languages. The invitation goes far and wide.

But we also can't say that everyone will enter the wedding feast. Why not? What do we see? It's because of their perverse human will. Many of those invited despise the Word. They plug their ears. They harden their hearts. They thrust the Word away, treat it with contempt, even blaspheme and persecute it. They resist the Holy Spirit and refuse to listen. They don't care. They have more important matters in life. Their will is hardened against the King, against His Son, and against the wedding feast.

It breaks His heart. It breaks my heart. It breaks your heart, too. I know we wonder what we could have done better. How can we say it next time in a way that wakes them up, that draws them, that brings them into the feast? But it's not as if we have the power to make others believe. We don't create faith. The Holy Spirit alone does that through the word. So we should bear witness as clearly, honestly, and persuasively as we can. Tell others of Jesus. Who can believe unless they first hear? No one comes without an invitation. And thank God for those who do come—that there are *some* who hear and believe and who wait with us in the wedding hall.

So, why are *we* here? Because the king **said to his servants, “The wedding feast is ready, but those invited weren’t worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.” And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad. So the wedding hall was filled with guests** (vv 8–10).

We’ve heard and believed. That’s why we’re here. It’s not because we’re better than others or more righteous than others but because of a miracle of the Holy Spirit. We might not even be able to explain how it happened or when it happened. Believing in Jesus and continuing to believe in Jesus is His work. And He has gathered us from the highways and byways, a bunch of misfits gathered for the wedding feast. Thinking of two of ours who recently went home, Keith Otto and Nancy Kangas, Ed Shaffer mentioned at our church council meeting how amazing it is to see such different people enter through the open door, such variety of character and diversity of gifts. That’s us. Not the “have to together” people but the people whom the Lord has brought together in faith. What must we do? Only this—believe what He says! Trust that the invitation is true and real and for you.

There’s a reminder, too, for us. When we hear God’s Word, when it convicts us, calls us, or consoles us, don’t wait. Don’t put God’s Word off for tomorrow. Don’t ignore it. Heed what you hear. Respond right away. Let your heart be sensitive, responsive, ready for Him.

Many are called but few are chosen. But am I really chosen? Do I really belong? But I know my own weakness. I can see the example of others who haven’t persevered in the faith, who have fallen away, so how do I know?

What does God say in His Word? Whose sins does the Lamb of God take away? The world’s. What did God love so that He gave His only begotten Son? The world. Whom does He desire to be saved? All people. That means you. Who is baptized into Christ? Whose sins are forgiven? To whom does Jesus give His body and His blood? To you. Jesus, the bridegroom, has truly redeemed and reconciled you. He presents, offers, and distributes these gifts to you. The Holy Spirit is effective and active through the Word. Even now, right now, He chooses you with a promise sealed by His holy Sacraments. Your being here is no accident.

Still, we fear that may be unworthy. What about that guy who showed up for the wedding feast but didn’t wear the wedding garment? I feel some sympathy for him. Could it have been an honest mistake? The answer is “no”! Here’s a man who refused to be dressed or covered by the king’s gracious gift of clothing. He wants to come to the

feast on his own terms, in his own way, covered in his own poor rags. It's as if he says, "If I can't be myself there, then I don't want to have any part in the wedding feast!"

Friends, know this: He certainly welcomes us as we are. We don't need to dress ourselves up for the feast. We don't have to make ourselves worthy or acceptable in His sight. He welcomes us as we are, but—and this is key!—but He doesn't leave us as we are—He doesn't leave us in our dirty rags. He doesn't seat us at the feast with the mud and muck that we bring with us. We come, and He changes us. He clothes us for the feast. He covers us with the righteousness of Christ, with His holy work, with His precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Even that, He provides for us.

Are we invited? Yes! Are we worthy? Not in ourselves, but in Christ. Are we chosen? But what has He said again today to us? Come, for the wedding feast is prepared for you! Come, eat and drink!

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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