

**Sermon 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost [Proper 23], Yr. A @ St Johns – 11/10/20**  
**“The gracious invitation of the King” (Matthew 22:1-14)**  
**- Pastor André Meyer**

Pray: Father, bless us in your Word today, for your Word brings life and peace, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Most of us have been to a dinner party, haven't we? They're generally fun and very filling. But these days, more and more, it seems that hosts are trying to 'out-do' everyone else by trying to make the experience more exciting or memorable than another. Perhaps it's more about the 'host' and wanting to be the centre of the attention or the 'talk of the town,' rather than about their guests? Wanting to show off their new dishes, or the work they've done to the house... Or simply how 'good' and generous they can be to their guests? I don't know. What's your experience?

Jesus' parable today is about a different kind of banquet feast, without any hidden agendas. In the week before His crucifixion, Jesus shares yet another parable about the Kingdom of God, this time likened to a wedding feast. A feast not to honour the host, but his son instead. The host is a king who has prepared a great banquet to celebrate his son's wedding. Perhaps for us, we could liken it to ScoMo inviting you to a family wedding... no. Perhaps like Trump... no. Perhaps like King William inviting you personally to the wedding feast of his son... ☺ (you can *live in hope!*)

When all has been prepared, the king sends servants far and wide to tell those who are privileged to be on the king's guest list, that it is now time to come to the wedding feast he has prepared. But, they refused.

When his servants return with the news, he is shocked, yet he puts the best construction on their reasons as he can. Then, he sends his servants out again. *“This time, they can't miss my invitation. The food's almost ready; they must come straight away. The best expensive meat has been prepared and it's spitting away on the grill; fine wine has been selected, opened and it's breathing; vegetables are being roasted to perfection; pots of gravy are on the boil; and the tables are set and ready... Come to the wedding banquet – let's celebrate!”* The king is generous to remind them a second time of this 'once-in-a-lifetime' kingdom celebration.

But, they refuse *yet again*. In fact, shockingly, the guests pay *no attention* to the second invitation. They go off, turning their backs to the king's messengers, back to work in their fields and businesses. They want life on their own terms. As if *they* themselves were kings and queens, they're more interested in their own 'kingdoms' of this world, rather than being part of the kingdom of their rightful King!

Other invited guests seize the king's servants, abuse and kill them. They treated the messengers, the voice of the king himself, with contempt; like burning a nation's flag

publicly and declaring war. *“We don’t care for the king and his gift! We don’t care for his son or his kingdom! We would rather have life on our own terms.”*

When the king heard his second gracious invitation was treated not only with indifference but outright hostility, he was furious. His righteous anger burned for being publicly humiliated. He sent in the military to destroy the precious ‘kingdom’ they trusted in – and their self-centred lives are destroyed.

And yet somehow, though righteously angry, the king is still gracious. Despite the destruction and judgement, there will still be a wedding feast to honour his son. A *third* time he sends his servants with an invitation, this time to those who would never have seen themselves at the king’s table. He sends his servants into the streets to invite anyone and *everyone* that can be found to his banquet. Whether good or bad, deserving or undeserving, fit or unfit, clean or unclean, sick or healthy, they are invited to come and gather at the wedding feast of the king. The servants share this unrestricted invitation with all they can find. They go, seeking and inviting all to receive the grace of the king until the banquet hall is been filled.

Somehow, the king, despite being disrespected and hurt, becomes *even more* generous and gracious. His gift becomes even more meaningful to those who receive the invitation, because now there’s *no doubt* that the guests truly understand they are utterly unworthy to be there at the feast. Though the guests may still be concerned with status and worth, the king is not. Nor is he concerned about their past – only that they come to share in the joy he feels over his son. When everyone is assembled, the celebration and feasting begins.

Later on, as the king moves through the hall to mingle with his guests, he noticed a man who was not wearing wedding garments – clothes befitting the celebration. Now, we are not told how the wedding guests are clothed... As many may have been poor perhaps they received special wedding robes as they arrived... or perhaps they were asked to dress up, either way, we’re not told directly, but Jesus implies that clothing was provided by the king for the celebration.

So the king patiently and respectfully asks the man, *“Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?”* ...So, what exactly *are* these wedding garments (other than literally) and *why* are they important? And, why did the man *not* have them?

The garments could represent the gift of salvation offered through the righteousness of Christ. This is the gift we receive by grace in baptism. The garments could represent the salvation we receive by faith in God’s Son. We have not earned these garments, but they are earned by Christ, and given to us. By His righteous life and His suffering and death, we receive ‘wedding clothes.’ Christ died for our sins, *“the righteous for the unrighteous,”* to bring you and me to God (1 Pet. 3:18). He died so

that all could be included, and not excluded, from His wedding feast. In baptism and by faith, we receive the garment of Christ, who covers over our sin, and who gives us a new status before God. In Christ, we are no longer unworthy subjects, but are welcomed instead as family of the King and His Son!

It's interesting to know that long ago when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they tried covering their sin and nakedness by their own garments of fig leaves. Not great clothing, but they gave it a shot! And yet, even *in* their sin, God graciously took away their sinful 'clothing' and gave them new garments instead – the skins of sacrificed animals who paid the price for them (Gen. 3:21).

The man without a wedding garment was likely wearing his own clothing, when really, he should have been wearing clothing suitable for the feast. He may represent those seeking to enter the kingdom of God by their own righteousness, or in the strength of their good works or cunning. The king sees clearly. None of his guests deserve entry and he's forced no one to be there against their will. Whether the king has provided the guests wedding garments or not, the man stands without them. He too has insulted the king's gracious invitation.

Yet, the king graciously *invites* one more time. He invites the man to explain himself. It's a chance to come clean and be honest, even to appeal to the king's mercy. He acts as a guest, insisting to be there by his own terms, but when given the chance, surprisingly he remains silent. He doesn't even show remorse for insulting the king. Instead the man remains guilty in his sin. We don't know why he's without the right clothes, yet he stands before the king, believing he deserves to be there by his own merits, or just, 'because.' The king is also offering a true relationship by his question. He's invited everyone to be there after all, and paid a great deal for their presence. Yet, here now is another, who insults his generosity as his subjects had done before.

So, the king is right to be upset. If the man had come clean about why he wasn't wearing wedding clothes, repented and asked for mercy, the king might have responded differently. The man gave no reply; he was literally speechless – guilty by his silence and stubbornness before the king for what he had done.

As such, he is bound and cast out into the darkness. This is where those live who suffer with grief and sadness for not responding to the invitation of the king. It's a picture of hell – or at least, separation from the celebration and grace of the king. Those in the darkness realise the heart of the king and the light of His grace – but all too late since the wedding hall is filled, and the feast underway. They only have themselves to blame. For, says Jesus, "*many are invited (or called), but few are chosen*" (v.14). The rejection of the grace of the king, invites its own sentence.

The question is, who are *we* in the parable? As a gracious gift, we are like the invited guests at the feast. We don't deserve to be there. Yet, God comes to find us where we are. He comes to the dark places where we dwell, far away from the king's halls. Jesus is the faithful Servant who comes to us in our need. He seeks us out and finds us where we are at. He calls us by the Gospel to accept the gracious invitation into His own wedding feast – a gift which He has paid for by His great love.

We are also the King's servants, going out, finding and sharing the King's gracious invitation. We are sent into the kingdom of this world to seek out and invite *everyone* and anyone to the wedding feast in God's Kingdom. Whether good or bad, deserving or undeserving, the good news of the King's invitation is to be shared, and we are the ones called into the King's service. Some will welcome us and respond; others will not. Any who reject the invitation, are rejecting the King.

Jesus graciously invites us to taste of His special banquet *already* today, and to come celebrate and feast regularly with Him. As our King, Jesus invites us again and again to feast on His Word and in worship and be filled with the good things we need. We know He has sought us out, saved us, and gathers us at His table to feed us His body and blood. At His table we are forgiven our sins. At His table we are filled with new life and His Spirit. At His table we receive a foretaste of the eternal feast to come. We are invited again and again to share in the feast so that we might be strengthened to go and invite anyone and *everyone* to the celebration and joy of God's kingdom. Thanks be to God. Amen.