

19th Sunday after Pentecost.  
Matthew 22:1-14  
**HYMNS: 603, 322, 221, 487, 287, 621.**

**Introit: Psalm 23**

P The LORD is my shepherd.

**C I shall not lack anything.**

P He makes me lie down in green pastures.

**C He leads me to water where there is quiet.**

P He restores my soul.

**C He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.**

P Even though I walk through the valley of deep darkness, I shall fear no evil.

**C For You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

P You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

**C You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.**

P Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,

**All: and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

Collect: Almighty God, You invite us to trust in You for our salvation. Deal with us not in the severity of Your judgment but by the greatness of Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. **Amen.**

**Old Testament: Isaiah 25:6-9**

**Epistle: Philippians 4:4-13**

**Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

The text for our sermon for this morning is written in the book of Matthew 22:1-14, which was our gospel reading before

**1** Again Jesus used parables in speaking to them. He said: **2** “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding for his son. **3** He sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding, but they refused to come. **4** Then he sent other servants and said to them, ‘Tell the people who have been invited, “Look here! I have prepared my dinner. My bulls and fattened calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding!”’”

**5** “However, they paid no attention and went away, one to his farm, another to his business; **6** and the rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. **7** The king became angry. He sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

**8** “Then he told his servants: ‘The wedding is ready, but the people who have been invited have not deserved to come. **9** Therefore go where the highways leave the city, and invite everyone you find to the wedding!’”

**10** “Those servants went out on the highways and brought in all the people whom they found, both bad and good. Then the wedding hall was filled with guests.

**11** “When the king came in to observe the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing a wedding garment. **12** He asked him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ The man could not say a thing. **13** Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’”

## 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

In order to understand the parable in today’s Gospel, it’s very helpful to understand the context of the culture of the day ... especially the context of royal wedding customs. After all, the wedding feast in the parable is the king’s feast given in honour of the wedding of the prince. The king has all the resources of the kingdom at his disposal ... the best food ... the best entertainment, he might even have his best architects and builders build a whole new building just for the feast. The feast could have lasted many days and so the servants of the king prepared the best lodging for the wedding guests. Money is no object. It’s a little like that today when you see in the media celebrities getting married, they spend millions of dollars putting up gazeboes big enough to cover a football field, or maybe renting an island or two.

One of the things a king would do for wedding guests is provide a fashion spa for them when they arrived. The king understood that travel was hard work in those days. People would arrive exhausted and dirty. The difficulty of travel might even make them a little grumpy. The king provided facilities for refreshment ... manicures ... pedicures ... fashion designers and expert tailors ... everything a guest needed to look and feel their best when they entered the banquet hall. The king wanted everyone and everything to be perfect in order to honour the wedding of his son, - the prince. This is one aspect of the culture of the parable that will help us understand it.

The other thing about the culture of that day has more to do with the simple fact that they did not have the same attitude about time that we do. We have digital wrist watches that can tell us the exact time guaranteed accuracy of 1 second every 100 years.. We have texting and cell phones and all other kinds of instant communication. At the time of the parable, even writing was expensive. Most communication was done orally, face-to-face. If you were important, like a king, you had servants do the communicating, but the communication was still a personal, oral communication.

This meant that there were always two invitations to a party. The first invitation was to inform everyone that plans were under way. This is the invitation that had the RSVP. Those who could attend would reply that they were coming. The second invitation informed the guests that everything was ready for them to come to the party. The people who received this second invitation had already promised to come. It was "*and is*" an incredible insult to excuse yourself after you had already promised to attend. Turning down the second invitation of the king was treason. Mistreating the servants who brought the second invitation was an act of war.

Jesus used these customs to illustrate His teaching about who enters the Kingdom of Heaven and who does not. This parable demonstrates the overwhelming generosity of God the Father and His justice. It also demonstrates the cruel insanity of those who reject the gift of salvation. The king is God the Father. The wedding feast is eternal life. The servants are God’s prophets, apostles, and pastors. Those who were invited and refused are the unbelievers. The travellers on the highways who were both bad and good are those who have no worth in themselves, but who are at the wedding solely by the grace and mercy of God. The guest who was not dressed properly is a hypocrite. His name is on the church role but he rejects the gifts of God.

So, what does this parable say to us today? Why is it important for us to hear this parable? It’s very easy for us to look through the pages of the Old Testament and see the many ways that people rejected the prophets. We hear how the people put the prophets in prison, drove them out of their homes, and put them to death, and we are right when we condemn these acts. We hear that of the original twelve apostles, only John died of old age. All the others died martyrs’ deaths. We wonder at such cruelty and once again, condemn it. It’s very easy to point a finger of condemnation at people who lived long ago and far away, but what about you and me. What does Jesus say to us today?

Jesus used the man who refused the wedding clothes to warn you and me today. We are gathered right now in the wedding hall of the king. How are we dressed?

Imagine what this man had to do to get into the wedding hall without the right clothes. When he arrived, the servants of the king came to him and offered to clean him up and heal his wounds. They offered him clothing that was just the right style for the feast. They wanted to give him everything he needed to fully enjoy the wedding banquet of the king. The servants offered it all and he refused. He insisted on doing things his way instead of the king's way. He insisted on wearing his clothes instead of the king's clothes. He entered the wedding hall, but, rejected the gifts of the king.

Pastors are the servants of God. When they open up God's Word, they offer the best of heavenly style. It's called the righteousness of Christ. It's a very expensive style. Our King had to buy this style with His holy, precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death. The heavenly style is the righteousness that Jesus earned for you with His suffering and death on the cross. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the only style that is elegant enough for eternal life. It's the only style that the true servants of God can offer to you.

As a servant of Christ, the pastor's job is to remove the filthy fashion of sin and clothe you in the heavenly style ... the robes of Christ's righteousness. Have a listen to the words that the Lord gave to Isaiah to write . **"I rejoice greatly in the LORD. Let my soul shout with joy in my God! For He has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness, like a bridegroom who puts on a splendid head-dress, such as a priest wears, and like a bride who decorates herself with her jewels."** [Isaiah 61:10.] When did we say those words? We said them right after I said, *"Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* By virtue of the office of the servant of God's Word, I cleansed you of your sin with Christ's forgiveness and clothed you with the robe of righteousness.

Sadly, Jesus teaches that there are those who reject the style of heaven. Jesus says that there will always be some in the banquet hall of heaven who insist on wearing their own clothes ... their clothes of arrogance, narcissism *"self-absorption"*, self-righteousness, adultery, hatred, and so on. The old sinful nature insists that he is good enough. He has no sin. He does not need the heavenly style of the righteousness of Christ. His style is just fine. "Besides," the old sinful nature will say, "A loving god doesn't really send people to hell."

Jesus tells it differently. The party crasher may have been able to fool the servants, but the servants are not the ultimate judge. We must all stand before almighty God *"every knee shall bow"*. There's but one verdict for those who trust themselves and refuse the clothing of the righteousness of Christ. The king said to the attendants, **'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!'**

Those who reject Christ, reject salvation. Those who in any way depend on their own efforts for even the smallest fraction of their salvation will meet the king and He will order them out of the wedding hall.

It's a different story for those found in the road though. The Holy Spirit works through His servants to bring them to the wedding hall and wash away all their sins. Through His servants He covers them with the righteousness of Himself ... the righteousness earned on the cross. The day will come when they, like Christ, will rise from the dead and enter into the wedding feast of the Lamb. There they will receive the fulfillment of today's Old Testament lesson: **"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet with aged wines, rich foods full of marrow, and refined, aged wines. <sup>7</sup> On this mountain He will destroy the surface of the shroud that is covering all peoples and the blanket that has been woven over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death for ever. The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and He will remove the disgrace of His people from the whole earth. For the LORD has spoken."**

They will rejoice at the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb. **Amen**

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

**3rd HYMN: 221,**

## Prayer of the Church The 19th Sunday after Pentecost

P In peace, let us pray to the Lord:

*"Brief Silence."*

P For the Church of Jesus, purchased with His precious blood, that God would preserve her in the pure teaching of His Word, in the right use of His Sacraments and in the unity of faith, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For our pastors and Sunday School teachers, for our organists and Church workers, and all who bear witness to faith in Jesus Christ, that they may be granted wisdom in applying the Word of God to our lives and strength for their calling, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For government and leaders, our military and all who protect us, that through their efforts justice, peace and order would be maintained in our land, and that through the authority given by God they would seek to serve Him and promote the welfare of our communities and nation, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For all married couples, that their union as husband and wife might be a reflection of Christ and His Church, that God would bless all Christian homes with His presence, making them places of peace and refuge in Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For all children, that they may be raised in the true faith and stand firm in the face of challenges; for abused children and battered women, that they might be protected by God's holy angels and delivered from their situations; and for children in foster care, that God would watch over them and that they would be placed into stable and loving households, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For faith to rejoice in all things, including sickness, injury, stress and need, knowing that the Lord is near, so that we do not need to be anxious about anything, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P For the growth of the kingdom of God, that through the sharing of the Gospel and the Sacrament of Baptism, unbelieving nations would be brought to the light of Christ and to His feast, let us pray to the Lord:

**C Lord, have mercy.**

P Lord Jesus Christ, You have invited us to Your wedding feast and prepared us to sit at Your table, having clothed us with the robe of righteousness in Baptism. Let no one approach Your table clad in the spotted garments of the flesh. Bring us at last to that feast which You have prepared for all people upon that mountain where You have swallowed up death forever, where Your saints ever feast in joy and where You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever and unto the ages of ages.

**C Amen.**

**4th HYMN: 487,**