

WE HAVE BEEN CALLED AND CHOSEN!
Sermon for the 19th Sunday after Pentecost 2020
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 today is our Gospel we just hear read, Matthew 22:1-14: 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,

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” What did Jesus mean with these words? When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian believers, he reminded them that they had been *“raised with Christ”* (3:1) and were the *“the elect of God, holy and dearly loved”* (3:12). We like to think that those words also speak of us, since we too have been chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight.¹ However, if we have been chosen, does this passage now put doubt in our minds? We feel called, and yet Christ’s words seem to suggest that we may be among “the invited, the called,” without being among “the chosen.” Look at the man in this parable who was not wearing a wedding garment. He was invited and went along to the wedding, yet he was thrown out. He wasn’t one of those who stoned the prophets; neither did he rebel. He was tied hand and foot and thrown out simply because he was wearing the wrong outfit. What does this mean for us?

Jesus begins His parable by saying, **“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding for his son.”** Since this is a parable, we have to assume that every detail is not significant, but we can align some of the images Jesus uses in this parable to what the Old Testament used, and see what Jesus was saying. The king, for example, represents God - the first King of Israel, and the only *true* King.² Until the people rejected God and demanded Saul³, God was King.

The son in the parable is the Son of God, and the wedding with its dinner feast is the fulfilment of the Kingdom and the outpouring of salvation which we see as the Church. We even talk about heaven as the wedding feast of the Lamb with His bride, the Church, still today. Revelation 19:9 says, *“Blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding-banquet of the Lamb!”* God was all set to fulfil the Messianic promises to send His Son to work our salvation. When He sent out word of this through His slaves, the Prophets, to the people of Israel, according to the story Jesus was now telling, they had been invited but were unwilling to come. They had ignored the summons of the Prophets. They had ignored the call to repent. They were all so busy with their lives and the blessings which God had poured out on them that they had no time and no real interest in the God who had blessed them and made them a people. They had other pressing things to worry about. They were more concerned about their own goods and wealth than to take the time to listen to God and His ways of life. It sounds just like today, doesn’t it?

Was the king to be deterred? No. He sent even more slaves. Still, the people would not listen. Their farms, their businesses, their pleasures, and their families were just more important. In fact, they found the crying of the prophets

¹ Ephesians 1:4

² 1 Samuel 8

³ 1 Samuel 9

growing more irritating by the day until they could bear it no longer and they began to punish and finally to kill the messengers. *“How dare they tell me I am sinful?!” “How dare they tell me that my priorities are out of place?!” “How dare they preach repentance to me?!”* **“They paid no attention and went away, one to his farm, another to his business; ⁶ and the rest seized his (the king’s) servants, mistreated them and killed them.”**

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” It is interesting to note that the Jewish presence in the Christian Church died out about one hundred years into the life of the Church after the death of Christ. The whole nation had been called, and so few ever believed and received eternal life. The destroying of the murderers and the burning of the city of which this story speaks was Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and destroying of the independent kingdom of the Jews which happened in 70 A.D. **“The king became angry. He sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”**

Jesus goes on to say that the king **“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.”**

So, here *we* are. These three verses cover the whole of the next two thousand years of history. This is the Christian Church. God has sent out His servants to *invite everyone we can find to the wedding feast*. That means the preaching of the Gospel. Anyone and everyone who would hear the invitation and come to the feast is welcomed. But keep in mind how many - who call themselves Christians today - believe something other than the Gospel we proclaim, the Gospel that the Scriptures teach.

Remember the call that went out in the parable? It is the same call today. 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!”’** The dinner is prepared. Jesus has taken our sins to the cross where they were paid in full. There He met the justice of God in our place with His death on the cross. Our sins have been forgiven, and God is pouring out eternal life to all who hear the invitation to the feast of salvation, the wedding feast of the Lamb to His bride, the Church. All is ready, or as Jesus put it from the cross, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). The call of the Church today continues to be that people would “Repent and believe.”

The second part of the parable takes us forward to the final day, what many calls *Judgment Day*. Jesus said, **“the king came in to observe the guests.”** Who are the guests? The guests are all of those who have come into the church – but not the holy Church as the assembly of all those who believe, and only those who believe. No, this is the church as we see her on earth, with believers and hypocrites mingled together. There are those who are indeed Christ’s, and then there are those who are represented by that man **“who was not wearing a wedding garment.”** In ancient times, the kings would provide wedding garments to everyone who attended the wedding. These clothes were festival clothes, sometimes brightly coloured, always brand-new. One of the benefits of being invited to such a wedding was that you got a new outfit. This was in a world where people generally wore their entire wardrobe every day. New clothes were almost better than money - and often served in the place of money, for those who could afford to give it.

God the Father has clothed each one of us who believes with the wedding garment of holiness, the robe of Christ’s righteousness which is ours in the forgiveness of sins. In other words, we are both called *and* chosen. To keep this image clear, remember Adam and Eve in the Garden. When they sinned, they were naked. Sin is nakedness, and God’s forgiveness, and the gift of righteousness, which is ours in Jesus Christ, is true clothing. The wedding garment, then, is the forgiveness of sins, and salvation, and the righteousness which is the gift of grace to all who take God at His Word and trust Him - in other words, to those who believe. In the Lord’s parable, the man who was not wearing a wedding garment is the hypocrite among us. He was in the wedding hall and among the wedding guests, but he was not wearing wedding clothes. This is not *just* any unbeliever. They did not enter the wedding hall. They are already outside in the darkness throughout the story.

The question from the king was simple. **“Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?”** If you are in the Church, you are expected to be wearing the righteousness of Christ. Can some in the Church not wear the garment? Sadly, yes. They are in the vicinity of the Church, and look to be part of the Church, but they are not, they are merely part of the *visible church* - the local congregation. Some belong to churches that claim to be Christian but teach *dependence on one’s own works* - or on *one’s own preparation for salvation* - or on *one’s own decision and prayer for salvation*. They think they have heard and accepted the invitation to the banquet, but they have come in without the garment of the grace of God in the Gospel because they never really heard it - but they were told they were *just as Christian* as anyone else - more

Christian, even.

On the other hand, how can anyone who actually hears the Gospel regularly not wear the wedding garment? The answer: They do not believe. One group of this sort does not believe that they are all *that* bad. So, they do not really ever repent, and therefore they never have forgiveness as their own, because they don't see any point in it. The Gospel has no value to them, and they don't bother with actually believing. There *are* people like that in the church. They think everyone else is just like them. They come for the music, or how it makes them *feel* to come to church, or they come for the social interaction. They never understand that they are different - except for being not like those religious fanatics who make them feel uncomfortable with all their God-talk and exaggerated (*to them*) piety and stuff.

Others don't wear the garment because they don't believe, full stop. They don't trust God. They want to earn it all for themselves. They don't understand all this stuff about forgiveness - after all, they know that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Some of these people believe some of our doctrines, but they know that they can't accept all of that nonsense that the pastor preaches. They say things like, "*He has his opinions and they have theirs. It is a matter of interpretation, right!?*" They like the crowd, they feel comfortable in the congregation, and so what if they don't believe all of that stuff the pastor preaches? They look around themselves and see that there are others too who don't believe it. They tell everyone they meet that they are just as good a Christian as any of *them*, and they pretend that they belong as much as the next man, and they are hypocrites.

Still, others can't stop long moving enough for the Gospel. They have their riches. They have their pleasures. They have their sins. Surely God isn't going to hold them accountable for *that*. They don't repent because *they don't need to*. They have a "right" to their sins, their unfaithfulness, their lukewarm-ness to the Gospel. They don't *need* to be in church every Sunday. They never look back. They never examine themselves. They never give God another thought as they do that Old Testament thing of getting lost in the blessings and forgetting the One who blessed them.

The important point is that however they do it, they make it to the wedding - that Last Day - without ever really wearing the wedding garment they have been given. They may have even worn it for a while, but it got too hot, too restricting, too old-fashioned, and they took it off and never looked back. When the King enters, He will know the difference. He can see what we cannot. He can see who is wearing the wedding garment and who is not, who is real and who is just faking it. The result, **the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, is hell**. It is eternal misery and torment, augmented by the knowledge that they are cast out into it because they did not take care to wear the garments of salvation which Christ has won and God has freely given to everyone to wear. And notice that *there is no excuse* for not wearing the wedding clothes. The man in the parable was in the hall. His failure to dress in appropriate clothing, which was freely given to him, offended the host. It was a deliberate act of rebellion, just as unbelief in the church is never an "*oops, I didn't realise*" but always a cold-hearted and wicked rejection of God, of His grace, of His love. Jesus said, "**The man could not say a thing.**"

Many are called, but only those few who place their hope and their confidence in Jesus and what He has done will enter the wedding feast of eternal life in glory with Christ. Those who trust in Him are also called "the Chosen." The number of the saved will not be small; it will just be few in comparison to those to whom the invitation has been given. The hypocrites will be separated from the people of God by the only Person who can see the difference, the person of the Son of God, who sees into hearts and knows what we believe and who we trust.

The feast is ready. We are all standing in the banquet hall. The invitation comes forth once more. Everyone who enters this church and hears the Word of salvation is invited - called. Each of us has been presented the wedding garment, for as Paul writes, "*because all of you who were baptised into Christ put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27). We have been called and chosen! Take care to wear the garment of salvation. Let the good news of the gift of forgiveness and of the love of God guide all thoughts and humble all hearts, and shape all actions. All our sins have been forgiven because of Jesus. Repent and believe and cling to Christ in His Word and in the Sacrament. For many are called - all of humanity, in fact, - but few are chosen. Stand fast as ones who have been called - and chosen! Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord God, You are eternally faithful and true to Your Word. You have kept every one of Your great and precious promises. Today we again come before Your throne of grace in gratitude for all Your goodness, in particular, for the gift of Jesus Christ Your Son, and for all the rich blessings we have received in Him. We thank You that He has accomplished our rebirth and salvation when it was humanly-speaking impossible. We thank You that in His life and being we see Your glory, that in the truth, goodness, and love He showed we see Your mercy and love, that in His obedience even to death on a cross we have forgiveness of sins, that in His resurrection from the grave we have the assurance of our own resurrection to life everlasting, and that in His ascension to heaven we have in Him One who brings before You all our needs.

Renew us day by day by Your Holy Spirit, that we may firmly believe in Jesus, love and serve Him, and show His saving power to others in all we think, do, or say. Free us from all love of earthly values, and strengthen our hope in Your promises. Make us more trusting in your mighty power and grace. Deepen our sympathy and love for all people, and remove every trace of selfishness. Keep us firm in Your truth to the end of our days. Enable us all to build one another up in common mind and purpose.

Heavenly Father, guard Your Church from false and disloyal preachers. Keep it obedient and faithful to all the teachings of Your Word. Enable us to acknowledge the work of Your Spirit through the Gospel wherever it is. Refresh us by Your Spirit, that we may remain in living fellowship with Jesus Christ, proclaim Your truth with living power, and minister to the needs of people around us with living compassion. Continue to bless the AELC and the ULMA with Your gifts.

Give peace and harmony to the nations of the earth. Enable people everywhere to live without fear or want, and free them from all oppression, injustice and cruelty. Influence all in our land to live in uprightness, and overthrow all evil. Help those who set their minds on earthly pleasure and material prosperity to see that there is no lasting value in them. Protect us from spiritual decay, and strengthen those who warn us of moral danger. Save us from every danger within and without, and help us to live under Your continued favour and blessing. We thank You for the apparent easing of covid-19 in our nation, and pray that in time, all nations on earth would finally be free from the illness and death it has brought.

Live in our homes, O Lord, and be the head of our families. Prove Yourself a helper in every time of need. Bless the weary, the sick, the troubled, and the sorrowful, that they may look to You as the unfailing source of all healing and hope. If it is Your gracious will, please send for rain to refresh and renew the parched land.

All these things, and whatever else we should ask for, we bring before You in the name of Your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The 19th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23)

Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ He will swallow up death for ever. The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces and remove the disgrace of His people from the whole earth. For the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day people will say: "Look! This is our God. We have been waiting for Him to save us. This is the LORD, for whom we have been waiting. Let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!"

Philippians 4:4-13

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all people! The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything but in everything make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving! ⁷ The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will also guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing and anything that is excellent and praiseworthy! ⁹ Continue to put into practice what you have learned, received and heard from me and what you have seen in me! The God of peace will also be with you.

¹⁰ I am very glad in the Lord that now again you have revived your concern for me. You have been concerned but have not had an opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying that I need anything. For I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in. ¹² I know how to be in need and know how to have plenty. In every way and in everything I

have learnt the secret both of being fully satisfied and of being hungry, both of having plenty and of having too little.

¹³ I can do everything through Him who strengthens me.

Matthew 22:1-14

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!"'

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