

RSVP
Matthew 22:1-14

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Every time I hear this parable in Matthew's Gospel I think back to a song that we used to sing at my home church in Maryland. It was called the Wedding Banquet. I had Mary but that song in your bulletin today, its printed as an insert in the announcement section. I grew up singing that song and it was very familiar even though it wasn't a part of our hymnal. We actually sang it so much at Salem Lutheran that the words just like this insert were pasted in the back flap of the hymnal. Please pull this song out and look at it. Now I am not going to make you sing the whole song, because even back then we didn't have the music for it, it was just known by the organist and so she played it and we sang. But I want us to look at it and perhaps just think about some of the words. By looking at it you will notice rather quickly that the song was written based on the Gospel reading for today. Its called the wedding banquet, and it tells the story of the rich man hosting a feast and inviting neighbors to come, and yet they turn him down. In the refrain as you notice is the neighbors response. Perhaps we can at least try to repeat after me the refrain in a sort of sing-son way.

I cannot come. I cannot come to the banquet, don't trouble me now.
I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow.
I have fields and commitments, that cost a pretty sum.
Pray, hold me excused, I can not come.

Simple isn't it. When I hear that I instantly remember being 10 and singing those words in church. It was such a simple song to pick up and remember those words. I cannot come, I cannot come to the banquet, don't trouble me now. Not until years later, when I tried again to find that song, did it occur to me that the refrain has us saying the words that we shouldn't be saying.

The feast is ready and the Lord is inviting us to come, we are not supposed to be singing I cannot come, pray hold me excused, I cannot come. But that is the idea of this song, to show how easily we do that very thing to the Lord's invitation. The writer is basing this entire song directly from our Gospel reading, which has the Lord preparing the feast and invitations are sent out, but the people say they can't make it because they are busy. So the master sends out more servants to gather all people, any people to come to the wedding banquet. In this third verse the master again wants as many people as possible to come to the feast before the time begins each verse leads us up to that final verse which gives the entire point to the song... that

we have to be ready and not left behind. To prepare for that great and glorious day when the Lord and Master calls we better be ready **not** to say...."I can not come".

So the song does have a point, by the end we know that we are not to be singing that refrain, but instead be ready to say Yes Lord, I will come! To check the Yes I will attend box, to send in the RSVP in the affirmative. That is a simple message, because we don't want to be left behind. That seems to be the message of this song and likewise this parable. It is a scary image if you stop and think about it. Jesus parable and this song I have shared with you warn us that the Lord is inviting us and we better be ready to attend or else.

I could write the entire sermon on that "or else" fear tactic and lay down the law, of the shoulds. Why aren't we doing what the Lord wants. Why do we shrug off our obligations of time, money, and prayer. Why don't we want to be coming to the Lord's table every chance we get. Why are we so preoccupied with so many other things in life that we say No to God and his ways. Why are we so full of greed, lust, envy, and other temptations that stop us from saying yes to the Lord? These are all valid points that we can make based on this reading.

But I believe there is grace in that parable also. The song makes us sing what we shouldn't be singing. The parable tells of armies that destroy and a man not probably wearing his wedding gown being thrown out into the eternal darkness of hell. That is scary implications – but lets see the grace also.

First of the beginning of the parable has Jesus telling us that the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a King who gave a wedding banquet. This parable follows right after a confrontation that Jesus has had with the scribes and priests in the temple. They question his authority to preach and teach. They question him as a man of God. And they question him as the chosen one of God. In fact Jesus so enrages them that the previous line in chapter 21 is that they want to arrest him, but are fearful of the crowds. And in light of this Jesus begins this parable within their earshot and in front of the crowds of people. The Lord's son is here and the feasting can begin all is now ready. But the people that were invited decline the offer to come. This of course is illustrating the jewish leaders. God had picked them to be his people. All the way back to Abraham, God has placed with them his covenant of love, and yet they reject him, even now when God's own son has come into their presence they still reject him. Jesus compares this to a wedding feast, where traditionally people would be told and invited to the feast they just didn't know when it would begin – since it is not like today where foods and planning can be down to the minutes. These large feasts could take time to prepare, and the feast may be set but the hour was always still to come. The people of Israel had been told the feast was being made ready, the hour is coming. The prophets had been saying this for

hundreds of years and yet some of them were rejected and some were killed. And when finally the hour is here, the Jewish leaders reject Jesus and within a couple of chapters he is killed. And so just as Jesus says and by the time Matthew wrote these words, Jerusalem had been sacked, the Romans had marched in with their armies and destroyed the Jewish temple tearing it down and laying waste to their cities. And so the people reading this parable of Jesus would instantly know that he is speaking of the Jewish leaders in this first section.

But then he goes on to say that the King insists that his servants now move on to others, to go to the street and everywhere, to gather the good and the bad, to gather all people. Jesus compares this to what he is about to do. He has come to gather all people the good and the bad to stand before God; to gather all humanity to the Lord. That is surely grace, the good news because we are a part of that invitation. Jesus the Lord is the one offering us this invitation to come to his feast, no matter who we are we are invited. He calls out to all people to come and seek the joy of God's kingdom. He opens up the way for all people to come and receive that place in the kingdom of God.

However the parable does have a caution added at the end. That we come to the Lord prepared. Jesus' parable ends with the King coming to join the guests and coming into the wedding banquet he notices one guest who doesn't have on a wedding robe. He is not dressed properly, not respectfully, not paying true intent to the invitation. And so he is cast out.

This parable gives us hope and yet it also has that cautionary tale. The hope is that through Jesus Christ the kingdom of God has been opened up to all people, not to just the chosen children of Abraham, but to all people of all nations. To people yesterday and today, people far away and for us right here today in this place. We are invited. But we also know that we come before the Lord prepared. We are to properly prepare ourselves to worship the Lord, to center on God, to come to his table through confession and through reflection. We are to honor the Lord and respect the Lord in all things keeping the true to his gift and favor he has given to us by bringing us into his eternal family.

The song is right we are invited, The good news is found right there in the parable, that Jesus invites us all to his eternal feast, let us prepare ourselves for that feast, let us pray to God and sing his songs of praise, let us show the honor due his name and majesty, let us answer his call and come on that great and glorious day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.