

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost  
October 25, 2020  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**Matthew 22:1–14**  
**The Wedding Invitation**

It arrives in the mail in a beautiful envelope. Sturdy paper, fine handwriting. Dear Mr....Dear Ms....or Dear Mr and Mrs and family. You open it to find a formal invitation to attend the wedding of the groom, son of Mr and Mrs so and so and the bride, daughter of Mr and Mrs so and so. There is a photo of the engaged couple and all the details. When and where. Lodging options and driving directions. Of course there is an RSVP card that asks how many will attend and if you want chicken or pork.

So you do what you do with any other piece of junk mail. You toss it in the garbage and don't think about it again. Of course not! This is a special invitation for a special day for people you know and love. You put it on the refrigerator and begin to plan how you can attend the wedding.

The parable before us today presents two sets of wedding invitations sent out by God. God, our King, shows his grace by sending his invitations to the wedding feast. He shows grace to those invited first and then shows his grace by inviting all people.

### **Grace to Those Invited**

Listen again to the first half of the parable, about those invited first.

*Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. <sup>4</sup> “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’<sup>5</sup> “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*

The king is God the Father and the son is Jesus Christ. In Revelation, heaven is described as the wedding supper of the Lamb. This is an invitation to be with our Triune God forever. Jesus emphasizes the grace of God in sending out such a wonderful invitation to a never ending feast of joy. The king sends his servants to those who had been invited. These are the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Think of all the ways God set his people apart throughout their history. He gave them the law through Moses and the promises of a Savior through the prophets. God gave them the temple worship that taught them what the Savior would do. Then he gave them the Savior, born to a young Jewish virgin named Mary. What grace he showed to the Jews to choose them out of all nations to be his people and to continually remind them of his promises!

And when Jesus walks among them as their Savior, many refused to believe in him. *He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.* This is a very strong and continual refusal to come to the banquet. This was not a polite “no thanks” that you might give to the telemarketer on the other end of the phone before hanging

up. They refused the invitation many times and were in a state of refusal. Nothing the king's servants could say would convince them to accept his gracious invitation.

What is the response of the king? More grace. *Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'* God sent more servants to invite his people to believe in Christ and receive the blessings of the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven. God reminded them that he had everything prepared. You don't need to worry about food or anything else. He has removed every excuse and prepared everything for a wonderful celebration. What grace God shows to us and all people to do the same. We do not need to make ourselves worthy to receive the invitation to heaven. God has done it all through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. What grace he shows!

But there is the somewhat common reaction to such an invitation. Ignore it. Forget about it. Choose to do something else. *But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.* There will be times in our life when we are tempted to put off God's gracious invitation to hear his Word and receive his forgiveness. We think we have to focus on other things for a while. We need to focus on school or our marriage or our career or our health or our children or our training or whatever it is. So we ignore the invitation to hear the Word and read the Word of God. We go off to the business of our life while intending some day to get back to the invitation God has graciously extended to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Some day may never come.

The first half of this parable ends with the end of God's patience. *The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.* About 40 years after Jesus spoke these words during Holy Week, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God. This is a somber reminder that God's Word is true, God's wrath is real and all who continue to reject the invitation to the wedding feast of God's Son will experience eternal judgment.

### **Grace to Invite All People**

The second half of the parable follows the same pattern as the first but with a new group of people to invite. Now we see God's grace to invite all people to the wedding banquet.

<sup>8</sup> *"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.'* <sup>9</sup> *Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'* <sup>10</sup> *So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

God, the king, continues to display his grace. He fully intends to fill his wedding hall. Obviously, covid guidelines on the size of gatherings and social distancing is not enforced in heaven. God wants to fill his home with eternal guests. So he sends his servants to all people, not just to the Jews, to all. Through the gospel, God gathers "all the people they could find." He gathers the "good and the bad." See God's grace in this invitation to all people.

The invitation does not come to you because of where you were born or who your parents are. The gospel does not come to you because of how good you've been and it is not taken from you based on how bad you've been. The gospel of God's forgiveness in Christ comes to you because of God's grace. Just as in the first half of the parable, the king prepared everything for the guests, so in this part the king has prepared everything for his guests to be at the wedding banquet. He even gives them the correct clothing.

But one guest did not want the clothing provided. *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.”*<sup>12</sup> *‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.*<sup>13</sup> *“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

The second half of the parable ends with judgment just like the first half. Why is this man thrown outside? Why would God send someone to hell for wearing their own clothes instead of the wedding clothes provided? This does not seem very gracious or accepting. We would not throw someone out of church for wearing sweatpants or jeans instead of a dress or suit.

Here we see that God’s grace is for all people but God’s grace is limited in this way – It is only in Christ. God’s gracious invitation to eternal life is not “come as you are.” It is instead, come in the robes of Christ that I have graciously provided you. John saw a beautiful picture of God’s grace to all nations in Revelation, *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”* (Revelation 7:9)

God has filled his heaven with guests from all nations and peoples but they have one thing in common. They all wear the white robe that represents those who have no sins counted against them. The only way to stand holy before God in heaven is explained just a few verses later in Revelation. *“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 7:14)

The grace of God is only in Christ, the Lamb of God whose blood cleanses us from sin. We wear the robes of Christ’s righteousness in order to stand before God at the wedding supper of the Lamb. What a gracious invitation our God has given and still extends to us. You baptism is the seal on that invitation that guarantees your forgiveness is from the one, true God who can truly forgive sins. Every time you receive the body and blood of Christ, you are being washed of sin again and reminded that you will one day feast with all the saints in the presence of your Savior in heaven. As you open your Bible, you are invited over and over again to believe that God has prepared all things for you to be with him forever. Don’t ignore it or throw it away. Stick it to the refrigerator and know that you will be part of the wedding banquet.

Amen.