

“Say Yes to the Wedding Robe”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
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Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Back when we had Children in Worship, the children would hear stories from the Bible using wooden figures or parable boxes. The parables were each in a gold box (like this one). All parables began with wondering if this gold box was a parable because parables are precious like gold.

This also looks like a present. Parables are like presents. They have all been given to us. We can't buy them, or take them or steal them. They are a gift from God.

This box also has a lid. Parables actually have lids and sometimes when you open the lid, you may not be able to understand what is inside and you may have to come back to it. (Young Children and Worship book by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman; 1989; Westminster John Knox Press).

Well today in the gospel of Matthew Jesus tells us a parable. This particular parable is not one that is in our Young Children and Worship book by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman. No, this parable at first glance is one that we would probably want to keep the lid on it. Because at first glance, it is a little difficult to hear. But as most parables go, we can unpack it and see if it brings meaning to us this day.

Jesus is telling us about the kingdom of heaven. As most parables go, Jesus uses something from most of our everyday lives so that we can relate to it. A king or a father is giving a big wedding banquet for his son. He sends out his slaves with invitations to invite his guests to come to this special celebration. Once the first set of invitation goes out to the guests, we find that no one decides to come. I find it interesting that Jesus has the king send out another group of invitations. This reminds me of how God never gives up on us! Unfortunately, these people make excuses and decide to go to their farms or their businesses.

We can all relate to the disappointment of the father, right? Jesus knows that we all have gatherings and celebrations. We all hope that people will come once they are invited. This gets even worse when we find that some of the people capture the slaves, torture them and kill them. No wonder that the king is enraged!

The king realizes that the people he invited were not worthy. However, everything in the banquet hall is ready! The tables are set and the food is all prepared. So, Jesus shares that the king doesn't give up and decides to send more slaves out to invite everyone in the town. The invitations go out to all the people – the good and the bad!

I remember years ago when my daughter, Bethany, was in high school. She had gone through a rough time of doubting, exploring her faith and questioning God. She had decided to drop out of all youth group activities at church. Her dad and I decided that she had to go church but it was okay if she stop attending youth group. The youth group director at that time was Sarah Ott. She really missed having Bethany with the other youth. Sarah took it upon herself to invite Bethany to all the youth planned events. Every single time Sarah would ask and every single time Bethany said, "NO!" Finally after a year, Sarah invited Bethany to a youth conference that our Synod was planning and she said, "YES!" I have always been grateful to Sarah for never giving up on my daughter!

Jesus goes onto tell us that king comes into the party to greet all his guests. He realizes that someone has come without a wedding robe! Someone did not come prepared! At that point, the king asks this person, "Friend, how did you get in without wearing a wedding robe?" The person says nothing in their defense. The guards are summoned by the king and this person is taken away to a place of darkness and gloom! The king sends out the message that many are called but few are chosen!

I would really prefer that this parable end with the king greeting all the guests and everyone in the kingdom lived happily ever after. But, Jesus wants us to learn an important lesson. As one commentator says, "*The error of the unrobed wedding guest is fruitfulness. Here the unrobed guest does not show the fruits of living as a guest at the banquet of grace. His downfall comes in the moment when, asked by the host to account for the way he appears, he has nothing to say.*"

Gospel living only begins with the invitation. It must become a transformed life." (Feasting on the Word – Year A, Vol. 4, Richard E. Spalding, Westminster 2011, John Knox Press, p. 168) It is true that many if not all are called and invited. The chosen are the ones that live in a new way in Christ.

It is no doubt that the Apostle Paul picks up on this very parable when he writes to the church in Colossae. Paul was teaching the church about being a faithful follower of Christ and building a healthy church. He says in Colossians 3:12-14, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

I appreciate this reminder that Jesus gives to us in this parable that many refer to as "The Great Banquet."

- I think we have to ask ourselves especially with Covid-19, when do we make excuses and not show up? Or show up and our hearts are not truly into it? There are days that I am so over it that I sometimes just check-out. I don't answer my phone. I don't listen to my messages. Are we eager to put on the wedding robe and live fully a life of Christ?
- What is it like to receive an invitation to a place where we want to go and celebrate? Do you count down the days and minutes until the day and time arrive to go? Do you feel like every day is an invitation from God or is that invitation only on Sundays?
- What is it like to give an invitation to someone? Are you embarrassed to invite them to certain places? Have you ever sent out an invitation to someone to have a new life in Christ? What would that look like? Would it be uncomfortable?

These are difficult questions and one may want to close the lid on this parable but remember to always be thankful for the grace we receive in Jesus! We cannot be prepared on our own. We cannot put the wedding robe without the grace of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.