

Sermon for October 15, 2017
"You Are Cordially Invited: Dress Appropriately"

Matthew 22:1-14

"You Are Cordially Invited: Dress Appropriately." If this parable were to have a title this is what it would be. The parable is all about an invitation to a special event. It tells how people responded to that invitation. But this parable is not meant to teach merely social graces; it contains much more. It begins with the phrase "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to..." So it claims to reveal something about the reign of God in our lives.

Knowing who Jesus was talking to when he told this parable will help us understand it. You see this was shortly after he had cleansed the temple. It was near the end of his ministry. When he was telling this parable he was in the temple itself. Jesus was speaking to the crowds who came to hear him. These were the people who had called him Messiah as he entered Jerusalem. These were the people who wanted to see him become their King. But the Scribes and the Pharisees were listening in on what he had to say. Part of his message was to them. And if anything they wanted to see him dead.

This parable was directed to the people, but it also had a message for the leaders of the people.

The parable basically has two parts. In the first part a King is preparing a marriage feast for his son. It is a special occasion and the King wanted it to be the best it could be. But some of the people would not come. Now people do not often fail to come to a feast planned by a King. You would think that the King would be done with them right then. But the King was gracious and gave them a second chance. He sends out his servants with a message. He said, "Tell those who are invited that I have made everything ready. The food is prepared, and the tables are set. And that the King says come to the wedding feast of my son." Once again they insulted the King by not coming. Some make light of the invitation and mock the King. Others consider their business more important than the Kings. Some even grabbed the King's servants and killed them. This angered the King, so he destroyed the cities of those people. Then the King said his servants, "The wedding feast is ready and those invited were not worthy, so go into the streets and invite all to come to the feast. So the servants invited all, both good and bad, to come to the feast. And they gathered people until the hall was filled.

This part of the parable represents the reaction of the people to the coming of Christ the son of the Heavenly King. In the parable the King represents God. As is often the case the wedding feast represents the kingdom of God which the Son will establish. A message had been sent, through John and other Prophets, to the leaders of the people telling them that the Kingdom was at hand and to make themselves ready to be part of it. They were being invited to a celebration of God's Son entering into his kingdom. Some made light of John's insistence that the Kingdom was at hand. Others just ignored him and went about their business. Some even went as far as to have him killed. Because the leaders of the people refused to answer the invitation to the feast, the King of Heaven went and invited the people directly.

This is the point of the first part of the parable: all have been invited. Jesus went straight to the people in the streets. He told them that the Kingdom was at hand. He didn't go down just the nice streets. He went down every street. He not only invited the good people who went to their Synagogues and the temple, but he also invited tax collectors, Roman collaborators, and sinners,

prostitutes and thieves. People like you and me! All are invited to participate in the grace and peace and hope and joy of the Kingdom, even a wretch like me!

It would be fine if the parable ended right there, but it doesn't. It goes on and that is where the trouble starts. In the second part of the parable the King comes to view the guests which his servants have assembled. And as he looks across the banquet hall, he notices one who is not wearing a wedding garment. It probably would have been easy to pick him out. All the others were wearing the white garment customary for the wedding. These robes would have been supplied by the host. If he didn't wear his robe, he would have stuck out like a sore thumb. So the King approached the man and said, "How did you get in here without a wedding garment?" He didn't know what to say. He had no excuse. A garment had been supplied for him to wear. So the King ordered the man to be thrown out into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the parable ends with those enigmatic words, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

What does that mean "many are called, but few are chosen?" And what is this business about the guest being thrown into the outer darkness. The parable had seemed pretty straight forward up to this point. Before this last part, the parable was a condemnation of the actions of the religious leaders. It was an indictment of the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees. It explained why Jesus took his message to the people. This parable told the people that they were invited by God Almighty to take part in the Kingdom and that they needed to respond and come to the banquet hall. The parable itself was the invitation.

So what does this last part mean? We need to remember that Jesus was talking to the people. It is true that the Scribes and Pharisees were listening, but the primary audience was those who were being invited, not the ones who had refused the invitation but those who were accepting it by listening to Jesus. This second part is a warning that being invited is not enough. All the guests had been called to participate in the Kingdom, but in the end some were not chosen to stay. The one who was not chosen was the one who was not prepared to participate in the Kingdom. Those who will not be allowed to participate in the kingdom are those who have not put on the righteousness and forgiveness of God. All the guests came to the feast clothed similarly. They were all wearing the garments stained and soiled by the dirt of the streets. They came wearing whatever they had on when they were invited. Those clothes were not good enough for being seen in the presence of the King. So all were given a new garment which had been washed clean and was suitable for the occasion. The message was, "You are invited to the Kingdom of Heaven, come appropriately dressed in a robe of righteousness provided by the King."

I am a servant of my Lord and King the Sovereign of Heaven. I and my fellow servants have been sent into the streets to invite people to a feast. I have come here to announce to you that you are cordially invited to a feast to honor and celebrate of the wedding of the only son of the King, the Prince of Heaven, Jesus Christ. The feast has been prepared and the lamb has been slaughtered so make ready and come to the feast.

You are cordially invited but you can't come dressed as you are. Your clothes are too stained by the sinfulness of this life. They are tattered and torn by your own cruelty and roughness. They are not suitable for such an occasion. To be allowed into the banquet hall you must be clothed in the righteousness of God. You must be wearing a robe supplied by God.

Don't go to the market looking for on of these robes. They do not sell them there, not even at Target. And even if you could find one in the shops on the square, you couldn't afford it. There is only one place you can obtain such a robe. There is only one who can supply such a cloak of righteousness to cover your ragged clothes. That's the bride groom himself, Jesus Christ.