

Twentieth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "So, What Are You Wearing Today?"
Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14
October 14-15, 2023
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Weddings come up a lot in the Bible. Probably the most familiar story is the wedding at Cana in Galilee, when Jesus turned water into wine. That's a much happier story than this week's Gospel, the parable of the wedding feast which involves a fair amount of bloodshed, if you were paying attention.

It's a strange tale. If the Queen of England had invited us to the wedding of one of her grandsons, William or Harry, I'm guessing not many of us would have declined the invitation! But in the story Jesus tells, the folks on the guest list have better things to do.... Not knowing this, the king basically sends out limos to pick them up, and the first time this happens the would-be guests tell the drivers to go back where they came from, passenger-less. The king sends out a second phalanx of assistants to pick up the guests, and this time those assistants never return, because the would-be guests are sick of being stalked and kill the messengers sent to retrieve them!

The point here is basically that all are invited, but few RSVP yes and then show up. Some don't RSVP at all, which is a particularly rude way of declining God's invitation. This is a little different, isn't it, than the last verse of today's Gospel lesson?

"For many are called, but few are chosen."

I changed "**many** are called" to "**all** are invited," because we don't believe in predestination. We hold Jesus' words in the Fourth Gospel close to our hearts:

*"...God so loved **the world** that he gave his only Son, so that **everyone** who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)*

Depending on the translation we're using, the people on the "A" guest list in today's Gospel either *make light of* or *ignore* the king's invitation to the wedding. They are "otherwise occupied"

and decide they have better things to do at work or at home. It makes me think of Jesus' statement to Martha when she complains that her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet drinking in His every word instead of helping her get lunch on the table. Jesus says:

*"Martha, Martha, you are worried and **distracted** by many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."* (Luke 10:41-42)

When the Lord calls us to invest our time in private prayer, to take the contents of our hearts to Him, to listen for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the world's din, do we ignore or make light of that invitation? When the Lord invites us to invest our time, our talents, our treasure, in the life-giving ministries of this family of faith, do we "hop to" or sidestep the suggestion? When the Holy Spirit opens a door through which we can walk to Bible study or other faith-engendering learning or fellowship opportunities, is our auto-response, "Wish I had time, but I don't"? Is every single activity and commitment that packs our calendar **worthy** of our time? If there's **no** time left for God, and for sharing our spiritual gifts with our faith family, our priorities might need to be recalibrated. This parable of the wedding feast makes me ask of myself, "Am I **ignoring** or **making light** of something God is asking? Of an opportunity God is presenting? Of a door the Holy Spirit is opening?"

In case you think I'm "preaching to the choir" since here you **are** in worship (either physically or virtually ☺), let's move on to the guy sitting at the reception dressed in grubs instead of his party clothes. The king picks him out of the crowd and asks,

"Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" (Matthew 22:12)

In case you didn't notice, there's ice in the king's voice. Robert Capon is a creative, faith-filled, very funny Scripture scholar, who says (in *The Parables of Judgment*, p. 124) that the word "Friend" in this context is more like "Buster...." Bub. Mac. Later in Matthew's Gospel it's how Jesus addresses

Judas who has led the chief priests and elders with their goon squad to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him:

“**Friend**, do what you are here to do.” (Matt. 26:50)

I’m tempted to get sassy, play the role of the fellow without the wedding robe, and protest to the king, “Hey, you didn’t send me a Save the Date, I was on the “C” list for this wedding, and the guy you sent to deliver me here didn’t give me time to change, so what’s your problem??” But instead of doing that ☺, I’ll get right to the meaning of the wedding garment. The wedding robe represents showing up with a proper spirit and in the right frame of mind, ready to say, “Thank You!” and ready to celebrate!

Sticking with the wedding metaphor, when I look out over the congregation at an actual wedding, I can tell who doesn’t want to be there. They look sullen, they don’t give me eye contact, they’re distracted the whole time, and I can just imagine them thinking, “All I want to do is get to the reception; why did she **insist** I come here first??” That’s not really attending in the right frame of mind, is it? Present in body, but not in spirit....

It’s possible to lack the proper spirit at the reception, too, though, isn’t it? You’re on a diet and every time a member of the wait staff approaches you with a tasty tray of hors d’oeuvres at cocktail hour, you think to yourself, “Get behind me, Satan!” Or maybe you’re seated alone at a table with strangers, or you can’t see the people you **do** know through the flowers in the middle of the table, or the band is playing at a punishing volume. In that case, we can say, sure, we’ve shown up **but** we are not wearing our proper wedding garment because we are not **ready** to say, “Thank you!” to the hosts and we are not **ready** to celebrate, really celebrate, with the bride and groom!

In spiritual terms, **the wedding garment represents a change of heart**. We can be baptized but still never have experienced a change of heart from trusting only in ourselves and

banking only on our own efforts to trusting wholeheartedly in God and banking on God's grace. We can worship regularly on the weekend, but not give God the time of day during the week. We can talk the talk in this building but not walk the walk when we go out through that "Servant's Entrance" into the world. I'm not saying perfection is the goal! Because the goal of the Gospel is to convince us that we can never get it right but Christ Jesus already has.

We screw up, we have a bad attitude more often than we should, we lie when we should tell the truth, we set our schedules according to our own desires and the world's demands rather than reserving, preserving time to respond Yes to the invitations **God** sends us. 'Not gonna lie, our first instinct is to hoard our blessings rather than share them, to spend our prayer time chattering rather than listening, to stay within our comfort zone when the Holy Spirit asks us to step out in faith. **God knows all that. That's why God sent us a Savior!** All we have to do is to embrace the Gift Given, to acknowledge we're in need of forgiveness, to accept the free gift of God in Jesus Christ, to hear Him say from the cross, "I love you this much," and to fall into His arms. Let your baptismal garment be **your** "wedding garment," and let it be your daily attire. Show up to life each day wearing your God-given, Spirit-driven change of heart, saying "Thank You!" and being ready to celebrate! Then go forth to serve and love God and neighbor in that Spirit of celebration and gratitude. Amen

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