

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 20
October 15, 2023
Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz
Come to the wedding

Jesus spoke to them again in parables. He said, ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding banquet, but they did not want to come.

⁴“Then he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!’

⁵“But those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized the king’s servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷As a result, the king was very angry. He sent his army and killed those murderers and burned their town.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹So go to the main crossroads and invite as many as you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those servants went out to the roads and gathered together everyone they found, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

—Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “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.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 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. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “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.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

The section of the Bible that is the basis for our sermon is a story that Jesus told about a wedding. Likely, you have been to many weddings, and some stick out in your mind. Several decades ago Pastor John Gaertner of our WELS congregation in Dallas, Texas, had the privilege of officiating at the wedding service of the son of Margaret Thatcher. She had been the prime minister of the United Kingdom. The wedding was held at the Queen's Chapel in London, England. The son, Mark Thatcher, married a woman from Calvary Lutheran Church in Dallas. As one of your pastors I have been involved in hundreds of weddings and wedding receptions. There was one when after the wedding service and photos, a helicopter landed on our back field and whisked the new bride and groom to the wedding reception. Recently I officiated at a wedding service at our US Military Academy at West Point. I have been to several wedding receptions which were on the barn floor of a dairy farm. I officiated at one on the shores of Lake Michigan where the ring bearer was a dog. I don't suggest that. And also at a wedding reception where the ASU mascot Sparky made an appearance. But today's invitation tops them all. Now today Jesus is urging you "Come to the Wedding Feast."

Before we go any further, let's quickly review the comparisons in this parable told by Jesus. The king who is hosting the wedding of his son is God. His son is Jesus. The wedding banquet is heaven. The Book of Revelation also pictures heaven as a wedding banquet. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 19:7-9) Those who are invited are the guests. To accept the invitation to come to the wedding of heaven is to believe in Jesus as the Savior.

We will look at three main points. The first and a very important point is that you are invited to the eternal wedding celebration of heaven. Imagine going to a beautiful wedding reception – the wedding place cards are at the tables. You look at all the tables and the place cards. You go from one table to another. But your name is not on any of the place cards. Oh my goodness, you were not invited. But the wedding banquet of heaven is not like that. You have a place – in fact, the groom Himself who is Jesus takes you to your place. On the cross Jesus suffered and died not for only some people but for all, for you. The Bible says, "God will have all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) You are invited. As we look at the story that Christ told we note these words, Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' 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. Yes, there were those who rejected but the king then invited everyone and anyone.

That means that no matter who you are, no matter what your status is, you are invited. Indeed, we are sinners but we are forgiven. Our Lord Jesus lived that perfect life for us; from us He took all of our sins, taking the punishment for them through His sufferings and death. Is it not amazing that it is God Himself who invites you to the banquet of heaven. The Almighty God, the Maker of heaven and earth, wants you to be with Him throughout eternity.

Today your gate is open, and all who enter in
Shall find a Father's welcome and pardon for their sin.
The past shall be forgotten, a present joy be giv'n,
a future grace be promised, a glorious crown in heav'n.

The second main point from the Lord through this parable is “Don't reject this invitation – don't delay.” Christ's parable speaks about people who had been invited to the wedding banquet but who refused to come. Can you imagine that! The king himself had invited them. It was the wedding of his son. However, if they had RSVP's in those days, they would have replied, “No, we have other things to do.” But despite how insulting their refusal was, amazingly the king sent out yet another invitation. “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.’ This time the wedding banquet is described, even the menu is given. The fattened cattle are being served. This meal was special in the day and age when steaks and roasts and prime rib were not common because there were no freezers and refrigerators, no Costco's and Fry's Grocery Stores, no microwaves, no gas or electric stoves. And now the meal was ready, the tables were set. What a rich banquet this would be – a wedding banquet that could be hosted only by a king. Who would want to miss that banquet?

But those invited foolishly declined that invitation. Work and business matters were more important to some; others violently opposed the ones who sent out the invitations and mistreated and killed them. The king in turn punished the murderers and destroyed their city.

The obvious straight talk from the Lord through the words of the parable is “Don't reject the Lord's invitation to heaven.” Don't let business matters and worldly things, as legitimate as they might be, take your focus off of what is really important.

Now it might seem that surely, we who sit in church this morning do not need Christ's message about rejecting His invitation to heaven. You have faith – you are looking forward to being in heaven with Jesus. But remember that the Holy Spirit put this wedding story as part of the Bible not only for others to read but for all of us, His children. Pay attention because in the ditches of the road to heaven are people who at one time did believe but who have fallen away. Among them might be friends and family members. And that breaks our hearts. We have to guard our hearts from indifference. We have to struggle against the DFW gang. The D stands for the devil. The F stands for flesh which is our sinful nature. The W stands for the world and its sinful influences.

How tragic it is when the Lord says to the one who rejects Him, “Okay, have it your way. Your will be done!” Why might some reject the Lord's invitation? Here are some of the many things I have heard.

- Challenging God and calling Him unloving and unfair for all the evil in this world. But God is not the cause of evil. Mankind is!
- Putting off spiritual matters.
- Making accusations that there are a bunch of hypocrites at church. Let's see how far that excuse will get one on Judgment Day

- Some as young people have fallen away as they dated unbelievers. Instead of standing firm in faith, they went the way of the unbeliever. One man in our congregation when he was dating used the acronym CLASS in choosing who to date.
 - The C stood for conservative in outlook
 - The L stood for Lutheran or one who would become Lutheran
 - The A stood for attractive
 - The S stood for smart
 - The last S stood for sweet.
 And the Lord provided such a wonderful woman for him.
- Some fell away thinking that regardless of what one believes, we all go to a better place. How tragically untrue!

Look at what Jesus says about one who rejects His invitation. For him there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If you are not a believer or if you are drifting away, you are hearing the Lord's invitation right now. There might not be any more chances to accept this invitation for the Lord might withdraw the invitation. Then it is too late. Your life is not a dress rehearsal - this is it. It is the real thing. You have no 'do overs'. There is no reincarnation. Now is the time! This is a serious and an urgent matter. Don't reject or delay.

We cannot bring ourselves to faith and thereby accept heaven's wedding invitation. The Holy Spirit does it all. But the way the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and keeps us in faith is through the Gospel message in Word and Sacraments. It is vital for us to be in contact with the Word by hearing it, reading and studying it. It is important to come to church and Bible Classes. A hymn puts it this way.

Delay not, delay not, O sinner, to come; For mercy still lingers and calls you today.

Its voice is not heard in the vale of the tomb; Its message, unheeded, will soon pass away.

Delay not, delay not! The Spirit of grace, Long grieved and resisted, may take his sad flight

And leave you in darkness to finish your race, To sink in the gloom of eternity's night.

The last main point we make today is "Remember the Dress Code for the Wedding Banquet." A dress code? Well, yes, there are dress codes. Some schools have uniforms. The military has strict dress codes. Hospitals have dress codes for their nurses and other employees. I know of a restaurant where shirt and tie are required – and if a man comes without a suit coat, he is either turned away or must wear one of the extra coats they have available.

God's wedding banquet has a dress code. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless." Can you imagine going to a royal wedding reception dressed in dirty filthy rags? However, the kinds of clothes we have by nature are filthy rags. That is what Isaiah says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."(Isaiah 64:6) We

cannot get into the wedding feast of heaven wearing filthy rags. The wedding clothes for heaven is the robe of righteousness which God provides. It is the robe of righteousness from Jesus. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. The Book of Revelation says that each of us will be given a clean white robe. "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:13-14) A hymn puts it this way.

Jesus Your blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.

This past August my wife and I received a piece of mail about an upcoming wedding that said, "Save the Date". The wedding will be held in February. You and I have from God a notice that says, "Save the Date". This is for the wedding Feast of heaven. It is when the Lord takes you home to heaven, whenever that date might be. Don't reject that invitation. Why would one want to neglect the beautiful and eternal future of heaven, the place overflowing with joy, no sickness or death, no sin or tears?

Did you hear how Isaiah in the Old Testament reading for this Sunday described it? "The LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:6-9)

What a wonderful invitation!