

Matthew 22:1-14
St Mark – October 15, 2023
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
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Once more Jesus spoke to the people 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.”

Living into Jesus

Our reading this morning picks up where Jesus left off in our reading last week.

Jesus is speaking to the chief priests and elders. He has put down their objections to his authority and directed his teaching to them. His words are pointed and harsh. No worse than what they deserved and probably no worse than what we deserve at times.

He continues to condemn their objections to his message and ministry in the we read this morning. This parable comes in two parts as and he directs his teaching to these Jewish leaders. Sometimes I wonder why Jesus even bothered with these leaders of the Jewish people.

He might have been confronting them to make a point to the crowd or maybe it was in hopes that it would break down their walls of resistance. Whatever the reason, Jesus doesn't give up on them. He continues to teach them with the parable we read this morning.

Jesus doesn't give up on any of the souls living today either. He offers his message and his extraordinary gift of life to everyone who believes in him and lives into that belief for the rest of their lives on this side of Heaven.

Jesus is teaching us how to do that in these parables we've been reading for several weeks.

Both parts of today's parable are about a wedding celebration, but each carries important instruction.

Reading the first part of the parable a bit more literally and thinking only of our day, not theirs, it goes like this.

God prepares for us a magnificent, undeserved, and extraordinary gift. The gift that is Jesus. He invites everyone, everyone, both good and bad to share this gift and many, so very many come.

The instruction to us is to accept the gift of Jesus; to take that initial step of accepting him as our savior. So far, things are going well for us in this parable Jesus is telling.

Now we get to the second part. Continuing to read it more literally and specifically for each of us things turn somber. God takes a look at all of us who have come to share the gift of Jesus. God finds that some of us have not prepared ourselves for this great honor.

I've been thinking a lot about that preparation and on Wednesday after our worship I hope that we will discuss how to go about doing the work of preparation.

I'll end this parable with Jesus' words instead of my own paraphrase.

This parable ends with God, represented here as the king, saying to his attendants regarding the man who has not prepared himself to receive this gift:

“Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The parable ends with these words:

“Then the king said to the attendants, “For many are called, but few are chosen.””

Many are called, but few are chosen.

We are called and we have come and we continue to be called to prepare ourselves. We must be mindful of that call. We each must find our own way(s) to answer that call.

Living into Christ goes beyond accepting Christ. Living into Christ is not easy.

When we feel the call to serve on the vestry; to assist with worship services; to invite our neighbor to come to church with us; to make a financial commitment to this congregation; or to search out those lonely souls who want nothing more than to have someone visit them, it is easy to push that call away, but that is not what Jesus teaches.

No matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable God's call to us seems we are to open our hearts and answer.

The eight souls who worshiped our Lord and Savior together a week ago today answered that call. Restricted parking and the crowds of the Apple Butter festival were obstacles. Obstacles that didn't stop them from coming together for teaching, mutual support, and enrichment of our Christian community.

All things are possible in Christ. If that were not true, I wouldn't be standing before you today.

The wonderful news of today's reading is clear. Every one of us, everyone, not one single soul is excluded. Every one of us is offered the gift of Jesus. The gift of life eternal.

Life eternal, but life as we have never and will never experience it on this side of death. On the other side of death, the life Jesus offers is without struggle, without pain, without fear, without tears.

Living into the narrow path is up to us. With God's help.