

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity, November 9, 2008**

✠ ✠ ✠

HYMNS: 67, 306:1, 371: 1-6, 330, 371:7.

LESSONS: Zephaniah 1: 1-7, Acts 12: 1-5, Matthew 25: 1-13.

TEXT: Matthew 22: 1-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Many of us have been to some kind of gathering – wedding, banquet, prom – where people were really dressed up. Brand new beautiful gowns for all the women, tuxedos, most likely rented, for all the men. Perhaps you have at least seen in movies or on television people attending a grand party or a grand banquet or a ball. People are really dressed up. Men may be wearing dinner jackets or jackets with long tails and either white ties or black ties. And the women are really very elegantly dressed too. Such gatherings, at least in old movies, even had a doorman welcoming the attendees and announcing them by name. What a grand thing it must be to be invited to such a grand, elegant gathering!

Well, our sermon text talks about such an important gathering. All mankind has been invited to a great gathering, called a wedding banquet for a king's son. Many ignore the invitation and refuse to go. So others are invited to take their places. But people who are not dressed for the banquet are not permitted to enter, even if they had an invitation in hand. Such a special gathering is the kind of thing Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus is talking to his disciples in parables in this chapter of Matthew's Gospel, which records the last week of Jesus' life. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Some of the pictures should be quite familiar to us, but parts of this parable may not be so clear. So today let's consider

**THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN COMPARED TO A WEDDING BANQUET**

- 1. Those who were first invited are the very ones who refuse to attend the wedding banquet.**
- 2. Outsiders, others, are invited and brought in to attend.**
- 3. But everyone must wear the wedding clothes provided by the King.**

This is truly a parable of grace, a parable of the Gospel. A king prepared a wedding banquet for someone special, for his own son, and extended many invitations. The picture is that of John 3:16 and the God who loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Obviously they had been previously invited and should have "marked their calendars" as it were, and prepared to attend, and the king sent his servants as a reminder with a second invitation and an admonition

But notice their response: *they refused to come*. We are reminded of Jesus Words on Palm Sunday as he looked over the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37-38: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.*"

Then he sent even more servants with some special instructions indicating how everything is ready, and it is ready right now. Doesn't this remind you who prepare the meals of calling the family to a meal – "supper's ready and it's on the table" – and the family does not come? In this parable we read "*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.**" We could think of the way the Jews treated many prophets in the centuries before Christ came. But we could also think of how the New Testament, especially the book of Acts in our epistle lesson, reports how the Jews treated those who proclaimed the Gospel.

How would you react? You've gone to the expense and work of preparing a special feast, here called a wedding feast, and no one comes. In our day and age it is possible that some who are invited to some special function can't make it, and they let us know through the RSVP, which is a phrase from the French language meaning "please send a reply".

Some have noted that there are really two kinds of people who despise the admonition: Those who may say "Please have me excused" and those for whom there is positive enmity or hatred of the Word of God. Note that some killed the messengers from the king. Then this is where the parable really gets nasty toward those who reject the invitation: But the king had good reason for getting angry. **"The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."**

So then the king takes a different direction. If those who were invited aren't going to come, the king invites others. **"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 there is a problem with one of the wedding guests. Of the people who had been gathered off the streets, and even provided the proper clothes, there was one who wasn't dressed properly. When the king asked him how this happened, the man had nothing to say. He had no defense. The king had even provided the wedding clothes so that every one would be properly dressed for this grand wedding feast. So this one was thrown out into the darkness, and the picture of the darkness is pretty graphic: **'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

This then leads us to the major point of this parable: **"For many are invited, but few are chosen."** Or, as you read from the KJV: **"For many are called, but few are chosen."**

So what's the meaning of this parable? Well, starting at the end, we see that although many are invited into the kingdom of heaven, only few get there.

The people who are invited first are the Jews. When they refuse the king's invitation, the Gentiles are invited. In this parable, Jesus warns both Jews and Gentiles that God's judgment will surely come crashing down upon all who show contempt for God's gracious invitation. The Jews show their contempt in two ways: some "paid no attention" to the messengers and went about their business while others actively mistreated the servants and killed them. The Gentile shows his contempt by failing to wear the wedding clothes the king has provided. The Jews are killed and their city is burned. Now this is quite plainly a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by burning it and destroying it so that not one stone was left upon another by the Romans in A.D. 70. The secular historian Josephus has some horrible word pictures of this destruction of the capital of the Jews. The one who was invited in off the streets but refuses to wear the wedding clothes provided is thrown out in to the darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, an expression Jesus often uses for the terrible suffering of hell. Here are two references to Jesus speaking of that destruction in hell: In Matthew 13:40-42 Jesus even uses the picture of destruction by fire: **"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** And Jesus also uses a picture of good fish and bad, worthless fish in

Matthew 13:48-5 *"When [the net] was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

So the bountiful table, the magnificent feast called a wedding banquet which the king has prepared is the same feast Jesus referred to in Matthew 8:11-12 *"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

This wedding banquet would be a grand affair. In a sense, we could say that a foretaste of this feat is offered to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. In the Lord's Supper, we receive the assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins as it was earned by Jesus' suffering and death.

There is another aspect of this parable which we dare not forget. The King provides the wedding clothing.

In the hymn we just sang, (Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness, My Beauty Are, My Glorious Dress) we rejoiced in being clothed in Jesus' blood and righteousness. The people whom the king invited off the street are excellent examples of those whose own clothing wasn't appropriate and wasn't good enough for the banquet. They had to wear the robes the king provided them, to cover up their own rags. We can't get into heaven because of our own good deeds, for we read in Isaiah 64:6 *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."* All of the people who are invited to the king's banquet are unworthy of his invitation. When the original invitees refused to come, the king said to his servants: *"those I invited did not deserve to come."* So he sent his servants out into the streets to invite anyone they could find. This is the evangelistic mission of Christ's church, reaching out to all who are not Jews, which began already on Good Friday as the penitent thief and Roman centurion were moved to confess their faith in Jesus. In fact, Jesus even before his sufferings had proclaimed the Gospel even to Gentiles.

This parable reminds us even of the Lord's Supper as we learned it from the Small Catechism, part fourth: THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION. Fourth: **Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?** *Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words: "Given" and "poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words "for you" require nothing but hearts that believe.*

Today we are privileged again to celebrate the forgiveness of sins through this sacrament. Faith makes us truly well-prepared. But Luther doesn't minimize outward preparations for Lord's Supper – things like appropriate dress, and mental preparation such as self-examination before we even come to church. We sometimes do minimize such outward preparations.

You have all received the invitation to believe and receive eternal life, wearing Jesus' perfection. Many of you have been instructed in the principle truths of Christian doctrine and confirmed your baptismal vows and have received the invitation to receive a foretaste of the wedding banquet in the Lord's Supper. May we all be prepared and receive this benediction: *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."* Galatians 3:26-27 May we all always be clothed with Christ. Amen.

First preached 10/12/08