

Faith Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, October 11, 2020
19th Sunday after Pentecost



Welcome

Call to Worship

We gather together in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. May we take a moment to go before God in open and honest confession.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen

Declaration of Forgiveness

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by His authority alone, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Lord of the feast, You have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out Your life with abundance. Call us again to Your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- Isaiah 25:1-9
- Psalm 23
- Philippians 4:1-9

The feast of victory

You prepare a table before me, and my cup is running over.

Rejoice in the Lord always

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God's kingdom are available to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again 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.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love a wedding! Everyone is in a joyous mood! People put on their finest attire. We see relatives and friends that we haven't seen in years. For some, weddings are the highlight of the year.

Weddings, rituals, and traditions have changed over the years. Even in the last, say, fifty years.

I remember weddings “back in the day” when I was younger. I grew up in a farming community downstate where your neighbor could be anyone within a *block* in either direction; a block being four square miles. When someone got married, it seemed like *everyone* was invited. Of course, your immediate family, your cousins, second, and sometimes, even third cousins. Usually, the entire congregation was invited. Friends and sometimes just acquaintances. Neighbors near and far, too. Heck, it was nothing to have 300-350 people at a wedding! And, most often, a large percentage of those invited attended the wedding and not just the reception.

Times and customs have changed over the years. Most folks can't afford a large, lavish wedding. Guest lists are trimmed down and sometimes not even the cousins are invited. Some couples choose a destination wedding, often flying to someplace exotic and exchanging vows with only a handful of family or friends surrounding them. And there is nothing wrong with this if that is what they choose to do. I like a big party, a big celebration!

I remember quite well my oldest sister's wedding. She was the first in our family to wed. February 13, 1971. It was a cold and snowy day. She was married in our home church and had a huge wedding and reception.

Six months later, on July 31, 1971, my second sister was married. It was a very hot and humid day, totally the opposite of my oldest sister's wedding day.

My parents weren't too happy with my two oldest sisters that year. Oh, they were fine with the choices in the spouse that they made. But my two oldest sisters married brothers of a family. And, rather than saving big bucks by having a combined wedding where the same people were invited - same relatives and friends and church members - my sisters decided to get married six months apart! My mom kept urging them to just have a double-wedding. They wouldn't. Thankfully, my third sister didn't get married until about three or four years later which is about how long it took for my parent's checkbook to recover!

In our gospel reading for today from Matthew 22, we hear of a wedding. Most people had attended weddings so Jesus' parable would have been somewhat easy for them to understand.

A king's son was getting married. It was customary back then for the guests to be twice invited. How's that for a reminder? First, they would receive the invitation so that they would prepare for it. Kind of like nowadays "reserve the date" cards. When everything was ready shortly before the banquet, the invitees would be summoned so that they might be there at the proper time.

I kind of like the idea of being summoned when the wedding banquet is ready to begin. When a wedding is at 1 pm but the reception doesn't start until 5 pm and you're in an unfamiliar town and don't know what to do to kill an hour or two, it would be nice to receive a notice when everything at the banquet hall is ready. Then you know when to show up.

This parable today invites us to put ourselves in the story. As a parable, it invites us to ask questions and think about God in a new way. It invites us to ponder about who God is and what God is doing.

In the parable, it's the day of the big event! The king sent his slaves out to tell those invited that it's time for the banquet. Everything is ready! Yet, no one comes. Surely, they wouldn't have forgotten. They had already received their "save the date" invitation.

So, the king sent his slaves out *again* to urge those who were invited to come. Look, everything is ready! The dinner is all prepared and waiting for you. And yet, again, no one comes. They could have cared less about the invitation. Worse than that. The gospel says that the slaves were captured, mistreated, and killed.

The king was enraged. Troops were sent, the invitees were murdered, and the city was burned.

Well, now, I still have all this food but no one to enjoy it, the king said. He instructed his slaves to, "Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet."

What a wonderful opportunity! To be able to sit at the king's table and enjoy scrumptious food! Oxen and fat calves. Rich foods and wine. Served on eloquent dishes and fine linen. Who wouldn't want to go?

Suddenly the wedding hall was filled and it was time for the banquet to begin. However, after the king entered, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing a wedding robe. He ordered his attendants to, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Wow! Talk about harsh punishment! And all for not wearing a wedding robe?

Let's think about this for a minute. After the initially-invited guests refused to come to the wedding banquet (even though they had plenty of notice and time to prepare), the king sends his slaves to go out into the streets and invite anyone to come. It was short notice so there were probably many folks dressed in their every-day clothes. Maybe they were work clothes or down-on-their-luck clothes and couldn't afford the latest fashion. Maybe they were working to feed six children and style was the last thing they had time to think about. Maybe they were among the homeless.

It didn't matter. The man was not prepared for the wedding banquet. And he was thrown out.

There are many ways to interpret this parable, yet one seems quite profound to me.

The man wasn't prepared. You may say, of course not. He didn't get invited in the first place. He didn't receive a "save the date" card so that he could be prepared. He didn't even receive a summons when the banquet was initially ready. He had no idea that he was going to have to drop everything and go to a wedding banquet - for the king.

And therein lies the problem. *He wasn't prepared for the king.*

He was doing whatever he was doing. Maybe it was working. Maybe it was sitting around and visiting. Maybe he was panhandling on the streets. But he wasn't prepared for the king. And *that* is Jesus' point. That is Jesus' lesson.

You see, God is preparing a party for us and for all those who love and belong to God! Kind of like today when we celebrate our first in-person worship service in seven months! We see family and friends we may not have seen in a long time. And though we aren't able to feast today, we yearn for the time when we can share the feast Christ has prepared for us.

God is planning a celebration, a delicious feast, where there will be dancing and great joy! And, best of all, the King and His Son, Christ, will be present.

The invitation has been sent. We have a "save the date" card in hand, though the date and time may yet be blank. We know that at any time we will receive the final call to join God. So, the question is: are we prepared? Are you prepared?

Our gospel reading for today ends with these words, "For many are called, but few are chosen." It is not enough to just show up. Just like most people don't crawl out of bed and head to work, there is preparation time. Maybe it's eating breakfast and drinking a cup of coffee or a glass of juice. Maybe it's taking morning medication. Maybe it's washing up or taking a shower, fixing your hair, putting on makeup, and certainly getting dressed. Preparation time is involved.

There is also preparation time for planning a wedding. The couple purchases new clothing to wear, chooses attendants to witness their vows, orders flowers, gets a marriage license, plans a menu, prepares the food, or hires a caterer. The guest list is made and invitations are sent. Of course, there is so much more to planning a wedding.

Preparation time is also needed for our future life God. Our eternal life with Christ. And the time to prepare is now. The time for bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven is now -- not later, not tomorrow, not someday, but now. The time for hesitation is passed.

Maybe the wedding guest in Jesus' parable was unaware of the urgency of the invitation. Maybe he thought there was plenty of time for preparation. Maybe he didn't know or realize or was informed, that a summons to God's banquet means an immediate call to action.

Remember the initial invitees? They came up with excuses as to why they didn't want to attend. They had other things to do. The wedding banquet interfered with their plans. Honestly, they didn't even want to be invited to the king's party.

I urge you. Don't turn down this invitation. Don't make excuses that you don't have time. Or that you are too busy. Don't let your response be maybe tomorrow, but not today.

God is ready for you, God's chosen one. The date and time are not firm. Yet the time to prepare has come. Will you accept God's invitation? **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Gracious host, fill Your church with a spirit of joyous hospitality. We pray for bishops, teachers, church leaders, and all children of God as they invite others to Your table of boundless grace.

Gracious host, as creation waits with eager longing for redemption, protect Your creatures that are mistreated. Restore valleys, mountains and pastures, and still and running waters.

Gracious host, as You set a table in the presence of enemies, so bless the efforts of diplomats, international peace workers, and world leaders who navigate conflict. May they proceed with dialogue and understanding, so that justice and peace prevails.

Gracious host, let Your gentleness be known among those who are weary or ill. Strengthen doctors, medical care workers, and caretakers who see to their needs. We pray for all those who are affected by the coronavirus. We pray for those suffering in any way this day, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time.....(please name your prayer concerns).

Gracious host, when we are quick to judge outward appearance, remind us how You clothe all in Your mercy. We pray for ministries that provide needed clothing and other personal care assistance in our communities.

Gracious host, as we remember those who have died and are gathered at the heavenly banquet, comfort us with Your presence. Assure us of Your peace at all times.

Listen as we call on You, O God, and enfold in Your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer *(please join in prayer)*

Blessed are You,

O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through Your goodness You have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to Your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that You have made, for the sake of Him who gave Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace, serving Christ by serving one another.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

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