

*Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost*  
*October 11, 2020*

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

**Prepare for worship:** Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

**Call to Worship:**

*Sanctuary*

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy, tried and true.  
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living  
sanctuary for you.

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**Centering Words:**

Invited by God, we gather to worship. Partnering with God, we gather to grow in faith and to change the world.  
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**Prayer of the Day:**

Teach us, Ruler of the universe, to see people by the light of the faith we profess, that we may check in ourselves all ungenerous judgements, all presumptuous claims, that recognizing the needs and rightful claims of others, we may remove old hatreds and rivalries and hasten new understandings, that we may bring our tributes of excellence to the treasury of our common humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

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**The Lord's Prayer:**

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**Affirmation of Faith:** Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination:**

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading            Exodus 32:1-14

Psalm 106: 1-6, 19-23

Epistle Reading                    Philippians 4: 1-9

Special Music

Gospel Reading                    Matthew 22: 1-14

Sermon                                *The Unchanged Guest*

**Hymn:**

*Take My Life and Let It Be*

1. Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
Take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet, and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.

2. Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips, and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.  
Take my silver and my gold;  
not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.

3. Take my will, and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love, my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.

From *The United Methodist Hymnal* Copyright 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House, 399

**Benediction:**

As Partners with God, go to serve God's world. As friends of Christ, go to share Christ's love.

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**Response:**

*God Be with You till We Meet Again*  
God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

From *The United Methodist Hymnal* Copyright 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House, 673

Matthew 22: 1-14

This parable is the third of three parables Jesus uses when confronted by the chief priests, elders and Pharisees about his teaching in the temple. The first, The Two Sons, points out that it is those who do the work of the Kingdom, not those who talk about it, that are living in the Kingdom. The second, The Wicked Tenants, points out that it is not by credentials that one enters the Kingdom but by producing fruit of the Kingdom. It also points out that the Kingdom is taken from those who rely solely on credentials but do not bear fruit. In both cases the parable is directed to the characters in the story: the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees.

But this parable is not directed toward the characters within the story, but to those hearing the story. The audience to whom this parable is directed is the community to which Matthew is writing. It is directed to the church of Matthew's day.

Again, the parable is about the Kingdom of heaven, with focus more to the eschatological aspects of the Kingdom. It addresses not only living in the present Kingdom but also entrance into the Kingdom at the end times.

A king was having a wedding banquet for his son. He had sent out invitations and now everything was ready. He sent his servants to tell the invitees that the feast was ready, so come. But the invitees did not come. Some simply blew the servants off. Others mistreated and killed the servants. The king then destroys the ones that murdered the servants.

The King in this parable is God, the creator and ruler of all things. God has chosen Israel to come to the divine banquet. God sent the prophets with the message of God's Kingdom but the prophets were rejected. The destruction of the city is reflective of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. There has been a tendency to view this as God rejecting Israel and Judaism but I don't think this is the case. We must remember that Christianity was a sect within Judaism until the destruction of the temple at which time the Pharisaic sect became the predominate sect. Verse 7 may be a later insertion, but it reflects the conflict within Judaism at the time of Matthew's gospel.

The king tells the servants to go out and invite everyone they find. So, the servants went out and gathered everyone, the good and the bad, the Jew and the Gentile. They just grabbed everyone off the street and brought them into the banquet.

This is what Matthew was telling his church at the time. The idea of there being one chosen people was erroneous. God wants everyone to be invited to the wedding banquet. Go, round up everybody. Bring everybody into the church, the Jews and the Gentiles. Go until the

wedding hall is filled with guests. (and I think God has a pretty big wedding hall.) Grab anyone and everyone.

The message to bring everybody to the wedding banquet holds true for us today. God wants us to bring everybody into the divine Kingdom. God wants everybody in the divine wedding hall. Bring everybody in: White and Black, Republican and Democrat, Gay and Straight, Men and Women, Conservatives and Progressives, Capitalist and Socialist, Saints and Sinners. Bring them all into the church so that all may hear the good news of God's grace. All may come to know God's love for them, God's love that accepts them as they are. All may hear God's plan of restoration. Let them all come to the banquet.

The King is happy. The wedding hall is filled to capacity. He is making his rounds greeting all the guests when he spies a guest who is not wearing a wedding robe. He asks why this person is not wearing a wedding robe and there is no reply. The person remains silent.

The king then does something that is surprising and maybe disturbing. He tells the attendants to bind this person up hand and foot and toss them out into the darkest dark.

Wait a minute! This doesn't seem right. Why would the King toss someone out when he told the servants to gather everyone in? And it seems a little harsh that the person should get tossed out because of being improperly dressed. I mean most people don't wear suits and ties to church. What if the person could not afford wedding clothes? They were just dragged off the street and brought to this wedding banquet. This person may not have had the opportunity to change before coming to the banquet.

In our modern context all these concerns may be valid, but this is one of those times when we must put aside our modern sensibilities and keep the parable within the context of the times in which it was written. Rather than looking at this parable literally we must understand it symbolically.

In the early church, at the time of Matthew, a new convert would go through catechism before being baptized and joining the church. This was a rigorous period of study and training so the person being baptized completely understood the meaning of baptism and the life to which they were committing themselves.

On the day of baptism, as the new convert came out of the water of baptism, they were given new clothes, symbolizing their new life in Christ. The new clothes symbolized that they were going to live their life under the rule of God not the rule of humans. Now a new convert may say they were not ready to make that step or perhaps they did not understand completely. At that point they would not be baptized but continue further catechesis until they reach the point of understanding and readiness.

Looking at this parable with that lens we see that the issue is not so much that the person was not wearing wedding clothes, but that they did not respond when the King asked why they were not wearing wedding clothes. The person remained silent. And their silence was taken as a refusal, a refusal to accept a new life, a new way of living.

All are invited to come to the wedding banquet. All are granted entrance to the banquet. It is not an invitation to enjoy good food and drink. It is not an invitation to live a life of ease. It is an invitation to change clothes. That is the truth of this parable.

N. T. Wright states that the truth is that “God’s kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered. They are the clothes you need to wear for the wedding”<sup>1</sup> We are invited to come to the banquet just as we are, wearing our clothes of hatred, prejudice, falsehood, cruelty, and worldliness but we are invited to take off these old clothes and change into new clothes, the new clothes of the Kingdom of God. We put on the clothes of God’s love, God’s justice, God’s truth, God’s mercy and are transformed.

By remaining silent, and not wearing the proper wedding clothes, the person was tossed from the banquet. They were essentially saying “I want to come to the party but I don’t want to participate in the party”. God wants us to participate in the divine wedding banquet. God wants us to take off our old clothes and put on the new clothes. God wants us to take off our old life and take on the new life in Jesus Christ so we may be transformed from what we were when we came to the banquet to what we will be as we participate in the banquet.

We stay at the banquet as we let God change us from what we are to what we will be in the divine Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2.*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 85.