

Pentecost 19-October 11, 2020  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
Matthew 22:1-14



## “Filling the Wedding Hall”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

*Grace and peace to you from God our father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*If you are closely involved in the details of a wedding, you can easily miss the importance of the day when you are overwhelmed with all that needs to be done on that day. Wedding invitation lists need to be agreed on. Save the dates need to be sent out in time so everyone you want to come will get their calendar open for your special day. The reception venue location needs to be decided on and secured early in the planning as their bookings fill up quickly. Brides need to say yes to the wedding dress. The bride and groom decide who will be in the wedding party. Tuxedos and bridesmaids' dresses need to be ordered and you have to watch what you eat so they still fit when the wedding day arrives. Colors for the day need to be coordinated. Flowers and decorations need to be decided and ordered. Photographers are chosen. At some point, the bride and groom decide who will officiate at the wedding and where the actual ceremony will happen. Programs need to be printed and official invitations are mailed. Then you must start calling people who didn't follow the instructions by responding by the deadline. These are just a few of the details of a typical wedding and it gets more complex with more elaborate weddings. So, it has become helpful to have a professional videographer record the day so that you can sit back when you are not caught up in the details and watch what really mattered that day. The same can be said for this very confusing parable Jesus tells about the wedding banquet. We can easily be misled in this parable if you get caught up in the details. Today, let us rewind what happens in the parable of the wedding banquet to listen to what Jesus wants us to hear.*

*I am pretty intentional about the ending of my sermons. What I say at the end might be the only thing you wake up in time to hear so I most often want the last thing I say to be “good news”, the gospel. If the only thing you heard Jesus say was his last words in this parable, it may not sound so good to you “For many are called, but few are chosen”. You might be left wondering if you are counted in the many who received a call or if you are one who wasn't chosen.*

*If you were only hearing what Jesus was saying near the beginning of this parable it isn't much better news. You might have heard that some people didn't RSVP when they received their invitations to the banquet, so they were called to see if you still planned on going. My ears perk up in this part of the parable since I am not very good at this step. Usually, we know as soon as we get the invitation if this is a wedding that we plan on going to or if we can come. But since we get the invitation so far in advance of the event and don't respond immediately, we sometimes are like this group in the parable who don't respond to the invitation. This group of people it seems the king simply dismisses. When this group is called, they respond that **they will not come**. There isn't much to do about a response like this. We can certainly understand how disappointing it may be for the king who has planned a*

great banquet for his son only to find out this group is not coming and don't give any reasons for not being able to attend or at least any excuses for not coming to the banquet after receiving the second chance to still attend.

This king still does not give up yet on those who received invitations. Maybe he sends slaves that are a little more convincing than the first slaves. He tells these slaves to inform those who had been invited about the menu for the banquet. I don't mind knowing what is being served at the wedding. But knowing what was going to be served at this banquet didn't matter to these people that rejected the invitation again. We are told that they made light of the invitation and some of them went back to what they were doing and the rest of them killed the messengers.

The king did not make light of what had happened to these slaves. He was done sending invitations and making follow up calls. Instead he sent in his troops and destroyed those that rejected the invitations and burned their towns. The king no longer cares about who was on the invitation list and since the banquet is ready to begin, he sends more slaves to invite everyone they can find. He sends these slaves to fill the banquet hall and he doesn't care if the people are good or bad. He just wants someone to come to the banquet that he prepared for his son.

This parable isn't done with disturbing details. Now after the king gets what he wants and has the wedding hall filled he notices the first wedding crasher who gets interrogated for not meeting the dress code of the day and is not offered one from the coat room. Without a word from the crasher, his hands and feet are bound, and he is not only escorted from the event, but is thrown in a place like you might see in a Halloween horror film.

When you focus on the details of what happens in this parable of the wedding banquet, you can wonder if there is any good news in this parable at all. After I read this to you today, I said, "This is the gospel of the Lord" and you responded, "Praise to you, O Christ". "Did either of us really mean what we said today?" Are you confused or even disturbed by this wedding that was intended to be a happy event? If this is what the kingdom of heaven is compared to, are you left wondering if there is any chance that you might be one of the few chosen? Did you get an invitation? Did you lose it? Did you reject the messenger who called to see if you still wanted to attend? And then and I mean this literally, "for heaven's sake" do you have the right clothes to wear so you don't become the one who after getting into heaven, gets booted out?

Now it's time to wake up to hear the good news. It is helpful to know that when Matthew recorded this parable, Jesus is still speaking to religious leaders who continued to question and yes reject his authority and teaching. But their questioning and rejecting do not prevent the king, our heavenly Father from giving a wedding banquet. You are invited to this banquet by word and by sacrament. You have received the first invitation in your baptism when you were chosen by God. You are called again when you receive the Lord's supper and every time you hear God's word spoken to you. If you have lost your baptismal certificate, you don't need to worry because your heavenly father never forgets who he has called and chosen through this sacrament. There is good news for you that no one in this parable is waiting at the banquet door wanting to get in. Everyone who filled the banquet hall was found by the king's choosing, not by your deciding or rejecting. More good news flows from this parable in that both good and bad were invited. And then what about this wedding crasher who

*seemed to sneak in only to be bounced out again? There is only one way that you and I can be clothed when we enter heaven. The wedding crasher thought he could sneak in with what he was wearing. He thought he could get in by his good merits, like so many today still think. No one can. Not even one. The wedding robe that you must be clothed in is nothing less than Jesus righteousness that he has given to you by his death and resurrection. You have just been invited again to this wonderful wedding feast and make no mistake, this banquet is ready and is for you. Amen.*

*Now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*