

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 19th Sunday After Pentecost, Oct. 15, 2017

The Wedding Feast

October 15, 2017

Matthew 22:1-14

Two weeks ago I talked about worry, a very human characteristic. People tend to worry about all manner of things as did the Israelites fleeing Egypt with Moses. They of course did have things to worry about, water, food, recapture by the Egyptians and more. In each case, however, they received salvation from their needless worries for they were in God's hands. Even so, they were nostalgic for the life they had lived as slaves. At least then they knew what to expect under their Egyptian masters and overlords.

Last week I again talked about worry, using Paul as an example. Paul was in prison facing death yet he was not worried. He put his fate in God's hands and remained joyful. Salvation awaited him and those to whom he was writing.

Salvation really was the theme of these two messages, not worry, and it is the theme of today's scripture reading as well. In the reading the king is hosting a wedding feast but that story, while not as obviously, is also about salvation.

The parable of the wedding feast appears in both Matthew and Luke (14:16-24) but Matthew's version is strikingly different from Luke's. Matthew's focus, as were the scripture readings from the past two Sundays, is salvation which is not obvious at all, is it? Further Matthew's telling adds a second parable to the story, a parable about a man not wearing a wedding robe.

The wedding feast is an allegory of a messianic feast to be held at the end time, the time of salvation, or lack of it. To understand the reading, you need, as I have stated many times about scripture, to consider the culture of the times.

If a great feast was to be held, people were invited long ahead of the time when the actual time and date of the feast was yet to be known. People were expected to prepare and be ready when the host actually sent a servant to tell them that the feast was ready. That wouldn't happen until the time for the banquet, and you did not by then make excuses as did the guests in the scripture reading. It simply was not done.

We don't know the time and date of the great messianic feast to come, but we

are all invited and should be ready no matter when it happens.

The first parable in our scripture reading tells us that many guests were not ready. They insulted the king and were destroyed. Allegorically they were the scribes and Pharisees who denied the message of Christ and thus ignored his message of salvation.

Matthew's version of the story was written well after Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. Matthew had 20-20 hindsight and was showing that disaster came for the Jews who had refused to recognize the Son of God.

The story reminds us that God's invitation to salvation with Christ is analogous to a great feast. It is a joyful invitation but is one which we must accept.

We can be deaf to the invitation. Many people are. They are too busy with things which are not necessarily bad in themselves. To tend to your crops or your business is not bad so long as your priorities are in order.

In the story, the original invitees to the feast did not have their priorities in order. They had many important things to do and preferred to do them rather than attend the feast. They were not necessarily bad but rather were unprepared for what really mattered.

The invitation to the feast was an invitation to joy. It is to joy that the Christian is invited and that joy is missed if the invitation is refused.

The Jews refused the invitation and the invitation went out to anyone who would come. The invitation is there for anyone to accept. It is their choice; it is my choice and your choice, the choice to accept the grace which is offered to us.

The end of Matthew's writing is the second parable that I mentioned. It is about one of the wedding guests not wearing the proper garment. In those times, the host would ordinarily provide appropriate garments, so what is this second parable saying?

Quoting Robert E. Luccock ⁽¹⁾ "*... in this parable the clothing the guest is wearing is a symbol of something far more serious than a dress code. One does not answer the Lord's invitation to the Kingdom wearing clothes of self-indulgence and careless devotion. The garments of repentance, righteousness, and praise are mandatory.*"

Each of us is invited to feast with Christ each time we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When you partake of communion, put it in the context of the quotation that I just cited --- the garments of repentance, righteousness, and praise are

mandatory.

William Barclay ⁽²⁾ said. *“... in the last analysis God’s invitation is the invitation of grace. Those who were gathered in from the highways and byways had no claim on the king at all; they could never by any stretch of imagination have expected an invitation to the wedding feast, still less could they ever have deserved it. It came to them from nothing other than the wide-armed, open-hearted, generous hospitality of the king.”*

The arms of the King are still wide-open to all who are willing to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who commit themselves to Christ.

Who do you know out in the broader world that in the confines of this or any church who would welcome Christ’s salvation, if only they were told about it? You are the King’s servants. Go out and invite them in. There are a limitless number of seats at the Lord’s Table.

Amen.

1. Robert E. Luccock, “Matthew”, Abington Press, Nashville, TN, 1997
2. William Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2,” revised edition, The Westminster press, Philadelphia, 1975

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Liturgical color - green

**This is the day the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Announcements

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Call to Worship (responsive)

The Lord is good!

God's steadfast love endures forever.

*Opening Hymn "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart" #145

Opening Prayer

Ever-present God,
you never leave us.

Help us to stay with you when we are tempted to flee,
and keep us seeking after that which is true,
that all may know that you are the Lord, our God,
a tenacious presence in whatever our reality.

Through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer Response Inside front cover of hymnal – In Unison

*Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Incline Thine ear to us, And grant us Thy peace. **Amen.***

Psalm of Praise Psalm 106: 1-6, 19-23. Pew Bible pages 944-945

¹ Praise the LORD.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD
or fully declare his praise?

³ Blessed are those who act justly,
who always do what is right.

⁴ Remember me, LORD, when you show favor to your people,
come to my aid when you save them,

⁵ that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may share in the joy of your nation
and join your inheritance in giving praise.

⁶ We have sinned, even as our ancestors did;
we have done wrong and acted wickedly.

¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf
and worshiped an idol cast from metal.

²⁰ They exchanged their glorious God
for an image of a bull, which eats grass.

²¹ They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²² miracles in the land of Ham
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

²³ So he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him
to keep his wrath from destroying them.

Call to Confession

We and our ancestors have sinned.

Our ancestors exchanged the glory of God
for the image of a golden calf.

They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt.
While our means are different,
our compulsions are the same.
Let us confess our brokenness,
for God is merciful and just
and will forgive us our sin.

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

**Holy God, you are the Lord our God,
who brought us out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery.
And yet our trust in you is fragile,
easily crushed by our bent toward indifference—
the dismissal of your faithfulness
as a result of our forgetfulness.
Our trust is fragile,
easily broken by the slightest pause—
an answer to prayer not instantly given,
a request for peace not immediately felt.
Our trust is fragile,
easily displaced by gods of our own making—
the god of self-sufficiency, chased at any cost,
the god of illusion, pursued in any form.
Lord, have mercy on us,
through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Assurance of God's Pardon

Beloved, hear the good news:
Jesus Christ came to stand in the breach
to reconcile us to God.
We are forgiven and freed!

*Gloria Patri #579– In Unison

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen

Prayer for Illumination

Holy Spirit of God,
shine your light upon this Word
and into our hearts
that we may be enlightened with fresh understanding. **Amen.**

Gospel Lesson Matthew 22:1-14 Pew Bible page 1538

¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.

⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and 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 wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

*Congregational Hymn “Come Ye Thankful People Come” #551

Sermon **“The Wedding Feast”** Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

Anthem "Jesus Paid It All", The Newsboys, Hallelujah for the Cross (Public domain)

*Affirmation of Faith *From "A Declaration of Faith" Presbyterian Church USA.* (Unison)

All things will be renewed in Christ.

**In Christ God gave us a glimpse of the new creation
he has already begun and will surely finish.**

We do not know when the final day will come.

**In our time we see only broken and scattered signs
that the renewal of all things is under way.**

**We do not yet see the end of cruelty and suffering
in the world, the church, or our own lives.**

But we see Jesus as Lord.

**As he stands at the center of our history,
we are confident he will stand at its end.**

He will judge all people and nations.

**Evil will be condemned
and rooted out of God's good creation.**

There will be no more tears or pain.

All things will be made new.

**The fellowship of human beings with God and each other
will be perfected.**

Tithes and Offerings

Beloved, do not worry about anything,
but in everything let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.

In the assurance of this promise,
let us confidently offer ourselves to God,
knowing that God has already provided
all that we need.

*Doxology #592 – In Unison

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer (responsive)

[A period of silence may follow each petition.]

Mothering God, you never abandon your children;
your steadfast love endures forever,
your faithfulness throughout the generations.

We pray for those in our world whose trust has been broken
through exploitation by people in power
or abuse by those in intimate circles....

We pray for those whose trust has been broken
through abandonment by those who promised to stay
or manipulation by those who refuse to let go....

We pray for those whose trust has been broken
through cold comfort in times of affliction
or callous rebukes of those on the margins....

We pray for those whose trust has been broken
through the trauma of war
or the chaos of assault....

Empower us, your body,
to enfold and protect those broken in body, mind, or spirit,
through your all-embracing grace
through Jesus who taught us to pray, **Our Father... Amen.**

*Closing Hymn “Joy to the World” #40

*Charge (responsive)

Beloved, may the Spirit guide us to that which is true,

that we may be set free;

that which is honorable,

that we may rise above ourselves;

that which is just,
that we may stand in the breach for another;
that which is pure,
that we may live with integrity;
that which is pleasing,
that we may look beyond ourselves;
that which is commendable,
that we may seek to do God's will;
that which is excellent and worthy of praise,
that we may praise the name of the Lord forever.

*Blessing

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Go in peace. Serve the Lord.