



Lectionary 28, Year A

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Gospel Text – Matthew 22:1-14

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.

¹ Once 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. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again 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.' ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰ Those 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, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then 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.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

SERMON TEXT:

The setting is holy week. Jesus is in a confrontational state of mind. The authorities are out to get him. And get him they will. But before they do, or while they do, Jesus is not going to go quietly. Jesus is going to confront his accusers and detractors.

Jesus confronts them with the story of....a party. A huge party. A party worthy of being orchestrated by a king. This party came in celebration of the king's son's wedding. Which means an entire kingdom would have been on pins and needles to overhear how such a party would go. Who wouldn't want to be invited to a party thrown by a king in celebration of his son's wedding?

It would be all of the best: food that you could smell from a mile away. Drinks that never ran out. Partygoers in their most festive state. A packed full wedding hall. And a seat reserved especially for the king's honored guests. It would be the wedding of the century.

The only thing missing from the party was...well the guests. The guests didn't show up. The king had put together a list. He had

sent out the invitations. He had the whole thing ready to go. But the chairs sat empty. The food went uneaten. And the bartenders were picking their teeth with a toothpick because they were so bored.

The most powerful person in the kingdom had been stood up. The son of the most powerful man in the kingdom sat embarrassed. When the king summons you, you've got to show up. To be sure, if the king summoned you and he was upset, maybe you wouldn't want to go. Maybe you'd go AWOL. Maybe you'd go into hiding. But the king was not upset at the beginning. The king was delighted to extend invitations to his son's wedding banquet. It was only when the seats in the wedding hall were empty that the king's mood began to change.

The king sent his slaves to round up the guests. Maybe the kingdom was suffering from amnesia. Maybe the days on the calendar were misprinted. Maybe the date on the invitation was wrong. "Go find them," the king told the slaves. The slaves came back reporting the date on the invitation was correct, the guests

appeared to be in their right mind. For whatever reason, they just weren't interested in coming to the party.

The king was nothing if not patient and insistent. So, he sent other slaves. "Everything is ready," those slaves proclaimed. "Come and eat. Come and drink. Come and party with the king!" But the invited guests made light of it. They went back to work. At least some of them simply went back to work. Others grabbed ahold of the slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

One commentator has said this parable, this story Jesus told about the king, his wedding banquet, and the resistant guests is a story that describes salvation history. From the beginning God has called. When God's people turned their back, God sent angels and prophets. God's people have a history of ignoring angels and prophets. Worse, God's people have a way of mistreating and even getting rid of those God has sent.

When Jesus told this parable, the cross was not far off. One more time God's people would do what God's people too often seem destined to do: they will put to death the one that God has sent. Those who should have known better, didn't. Those who should

have taken their seats around the table with Jesus instead complained about him. And they complained about the people he related to. And they complained about the kinds of people he welcomed into community. And they were distraught at the forgiveness that he too easily extended to people who didn't deserve it.

People of God, the first thing this parable would confront us with is humility. As God's people, we stand in a long line of folks who don't understand. Who want a God that makes us powerful. We stand in a long line of the faithful who want a God that smites our enemies all the while believing that we are immune from God's punishment and wrath. If the people of the Bible tell us anything it is that we are not always going to get it right. We are always in need of God's forgiveness and grace. In this way we stand as one with all of humanity. We, of all people, ought to know that humility is part of being called God's own.

But we simply cannot help ourselves. And so the first thing this parable does to us is to warn us. "The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city."

While the coals of the city were still smoldering, the king sent his slaves. Again. Go and invited EVERYONE...EVERYONE...Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good AND bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests." Those on the king's guestlist did not respond. So the slaves found people who apparently survived the burning of the city. The king found the lucky ones. The ones who were somehow saved from the destruction. They were the good, they were the bad, and they were everyone in between. The king got what he wanted. That's the thing about king's. King's generally get what they want.

You just never know who is going to respond. If you think the Christian community you have joined for worship this morning is only full of the good, you ought to get to know them a little better. It's surprising the kinds of people you find worshipping on any given Sunday in any given Christian community. I mean to tell you, God has a way of calling the wrong kinds of people. And it can be confusing. And it can be messy. And it can be uncomfortable.

There was a young pastor. It was the 2nd congregation she had been called to. There was controversy around the children's Christmas pageant. The leader wanted Santa to show up at the end. The pastor thought kids and families could find Santa elsewhere...how about the story of Saint Nick instead, she suggested. It was a suggestion that ended with the leader blowing up and walking out of her office. The pastor waited a day and called, hoping cooler heads would prevail. It seemed impossible but the phone call went worse than the initial conversation. The leader of the Christmas pageant quit, leaving the entire event in peril. The pastor was thankful for other adults who stepped forward to lead.

The pastor marveled at the leader who quit. She kept attending worship, which the pastor thought was extraordinary. But this leader who quit would no longer talk to the pastor. She walked through the handshake line without a word spoken or hand extended. It lasted 6 months. Which was when the angry former Christmas pageant leader called. Her husband had a brain tumor. He wasn't going to make it. The end was near. Would

she come and visit. She would go and visit. Several times this pastor went and visited. And then she presided at the funeral. And then she became an important adult in the life of the daughter of the former Christmas pageant leader. Neither of them ever spoke of the disagreement again.

Because even though it looks like God calls the wrong people, sometimes it takes hanging in there together. Christian community has a tendency of rubbing off our rough edges. Christian community will not leave us unchanged. Both the pastor and the former Christmas pageant leader would attest to that.

That wedding guest without the robe? Some scholars think that is representative of the person who doesn't grow in Christian community. The one who is present but for whom God's grace and love do not break through. I wonder if that one in Jesus story stood out because they did not participate. They did not experience the give and take that living in Christian community demands of us and so they did not know Jesus as he comes to us in the grace and forgiveness of the Christian community.

We find Jesus in a confrontational mood this morning. And if you think Jesus is only confronting someone else, stick around a while. Participate in Christian community. Be molded by the God whose invitation is wide. At the end of the day, your humility will be challenged to remain part of a community like that.

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