

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalms 23

Philippines 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

10/15/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

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 Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Banquet

Good morning! What a text! Unlike the warm reception we received at the 50th anniversary banquet for the Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center on Thursday, this meal goes MUCH differently! If your reaction is anything like mine, or the rest of us who gathered on Zoom this past Monday to discuss this passage, you’re a little confused. But have no fear, Dr. Douglas R.A. Hare is here. This is the TL;DR of the story. *“In its Matthean form the parable, like the immediately preceding parable of the wicked tenants, can be characterized as an allegory of salvation history. The king is clearly God; the wedding feast for his son represents the messianic banquet (cf. Rev. 19:7-9). Those sent to invite the guests are God’s prophets, including Christian missionaries. The reference to the mistreatment of the king’s slaves recalls the tradition concerning Israel’s violent treatment of God’s prophets (see comments on 21:33-46; 23:29-39). The burning of the rebels’ city seems to be an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE... The invitation offered to others, ‘both bad and good,’ signifies the Gentile mission of the church.”*¹ The final confusing detail is regarding the king's treatment of the guest who doesn't have a wedding garment for the banquet. This guest represents

¹ Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 251.

those who only make a show of being a Christian, never fully committing to the faith.

But let's dive in deeper and hopefully get a better grasp of the text. The first thing to realize is that the story is connected to our Gospel lessons from the previous three weeks. All of them are delivered to the same group of people and should be seen as a unit together. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem at the end of his ministry and chases the money changers out of the Temple. The following day he arrives and is questioned by the "chief priests, scribes, and pharisees." He launches into the Gospel lessons we have had over the past three weeks. I will admit, I think our text today is a little more understandable if the congregation has heard those three sermons leading up to today. But I, on the other hand, have spent the first week preaching about money and last week about the Philippians text.

But, as I said, the texts are connected. Don't believe me? Listen to Dr. Eugene Boring: *"By extending its allegorical features, assimilating it to the preceding two parables, and placing it last, Matthew makes this story the climax of the progression of this three-parable set... The father/son motif bind together all three parables of this unit."*² We have to see them as a unit. But where the third one differs from the first two is that it shifts the focus from the Jewish response and rejection of Jesus and other prophets, to the commitment of Christian believers.

One thing to realize about this passage is that it's not the best allegory and example that Jesus uses. Remember, Jesus said that "the kingdom of Heaven could be compared," not that it was a perfect parable. Twice in the story we are forced to bend what we might expect. The first is when the king

² Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. pp. 308-309.

pauses the dinner banquet to go to war, pillaging and burning his enemies all while the food sits ready to eat. The second time is when a guest, who has literally been rushed to the feast, is thrown out for not being dressed appropriately. My first reaction whenever hearing this story is to think “Well that’s no way to treat a guest! You invite the poor man and then throw him out when he’s not dressed to your liking!” Dr. Eugene Boring writes “*Again, realism is sacrificed to theological meaning.*”³

Which brings us to Jesus’ main point. In verse 9 the New Revised Standard Version translates the text as “main streets,” but the better word would be “thoroughfares.” One scholar points out that it “*likely refers to the place where the street goes through the city boundary and out into open country. The servants have to make a real effort to find the new guests by going out to the countryside.*”⁴ The point that Jesus is trying to make is that while the original invitation from God was to a select few, the good news now goes out to anyone and everyone! The Gentile believer is given a chance at something great.

But in order to enjoy this feast we must be sincere. Dr. Hare writes that “*the... parable of the guest without a wedding garment is offensive to uninstructed readers.*”⁵ Like the guests, our faith must be sincere. It must be genuine and real. This is something that no other person can tell you. Only yourself and God know the truth here. The Christian faith is often compared to putting on a garment or clothing, and so the image fits here. One final interesting detail. Dr. Boring writes that “*Matthew does not use ‘call’ in the sense of ‘effective call,’ as does Paul, but in the sense of initial*

³ Ibid. p. 310.

⁴ Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 306.

⁵ Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 252.

*invitation to become a disciple. Whether one is actually ‘chosen’... i.e., accepted in the last judgment depends on manifesting authentic Christian faith in deeds of love and justice.”*⁶ Like any conversation, God’s call requires a response.

So what does that response look like? I’m glad you asked! Listen to the words of Paul in Philippians and see for yourself: *“4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”*⁷ Amen.

⁶ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 310.

⁷ Philippians 4:4-9 NRSV