

Will you come? By Tim Hall

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (A) – October 15, 2017

**[RCL:] Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14**

The Israelites are at it again. Moses is up on Mt. Sinai, working with God on the Covenant between God and his people. They are witness to the powerful acts of God transpiring before them. There is fire and smoke, thunder and lightning as Moses confers with the LORD. And they have experienced the awesome acts of power the LORD has done for them... the plagues on the Pharaoh and Egypt, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, the water from a rock.

And yet, here they go again. *“Where is Moses?” “We don’t know what’s become of him.” “Aaron, make gods for us!”* As if that’s even possible... that we should make our own gods! But Aaron does as they ask and, after casting a golden calf and building an altar to it, regular Bacchanalian reveling ensues. God is mightily angered by what he sees and tells Moses he is ready to destroy them all. Ready to finally give up on the descendants of Abraham and start a new great nation with the descendants of Moses.

But Moses intercedes on their behalf. Just as Abraham interceded with God on behalf of the city of Sodom. And God’s mind is changed. This is good news for us... Do we ever find ourselves, like the Hebrews, making our own gods? Sports. Celebrities. Alcohol. Drugs. Our careers. What else do we place on an altar, replacing the one true God and slipping further and further away from him into the abyss of our own pride and self-indulgence?

The good news is that the LORD is a forgiving God. And he will welcome us back into his fold, there to nurture us and protect us and prepare us for the final days to spend eternity in his Glory. But we’ve got to want it. We must repent and return to the LORD.

This morning, Jesus tells the Parable of the Wedding Feast. This is a story about choice. God gives us a choice... whether to join him or not. He extends the invitation. Will you come?

To better understand the context of this story, it is important to know some basic facts about weddings in Jesus’ day.

In Jewish society, the parents of the betrothed generally drew up the marriage contract. The bride and groom would meet, perhaps for the first time, when this contract was signed. The couple was considered married at this point, but they would remain apart until the actual time of the ceremony. The bride would stay with her parents, and the groom would leave to prepare their home. This could take quite a while. When the home was ready, the groom would return for his bride without notice. The marriage ceremony would then take place, and the wedding banquet would follow.

The wedding banquet was one of the most joyous occasions in Jewish life and could last for days. In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet that a king

had prepared for his son. Many people were invited, but when the time for the banquet came and the table was set, those invited refused to come. In fact, the king's servants who brought the joyful message were mistreated and even killed.

The king, enraged at the response of those who had been invited, sent his army to avenge the death of his servants. He then sent invitations to *anyone* his servants could find, with the result that the wedding hall was filled.

In this parable, the king is God the Father, and the son who is being honored at the banquet is Jesus Christ. Israel held the invitation to the kingdom, but when the time actually came for the kingdom to appear, they refused to believe it. Many prophets, including John the Baptist, had been murdered. The king's reprisal against the murderers can be interpreted as a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Romans. More broadly, the king's vengeance speaks of the desolation mentioned in the book of Revelation. God is patient, but He will not tolerate wickedness forever. His judgment will come upon those who reject His offer of salvation.

Note that it is not because the invited guests *could not* come to the wedding feast, but that they *would not* come. Everyone had an excuse. How tragic, and how indicative of human nature, to be offered the blessings of God and to refuse them because of the draw of mundane things!

The wedding invitation is extended to anyone and everyone, total strangers, both good and bad. This refers to the gospel being taken to the Gentiles. The gospel message, Jesus taught, would be made available to everyone. Paul tells the Gentiles at Philippi, the church he founded in Macedonia, now a part of Greece, that "The LORD is near. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

But what about the matter of the wedding garment? It would be a gross insult to the king to refuse to wear the garment provided to the guests. The man who was caught wearing his old clothing learned what an offense it was as he was ejected from the feast, put "outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Jesus then ends the parable with this statement: "For many are invited, but few are chosen".

We do have a choice. The man has heeded the invitation, but not accepted it fully. Will you come? With an open heart, keeping in mind "whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable", beloved, will you come?

Just as the king provided wedding garments for his guests, God provides salvation for humanity. From the very beginning, God has provided a "covering" for our sin. To insist on covering ourselves, i.e. creating our own gods, is to be clad in "filthy rags". Adam and Eve tried to cover their shame, but they found their fig leaves to be woefully scant. God saw their wretchedness and clothed them himself, an act of undeserved forgiveness. Amazing grace!

In the book of Revelation, we see those in heaven wearing "white robes", and we learn that the whiteness of the robes is due to their being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Our wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ, and unless we have it, we will miss the wedding feast. Christ died for our sins. Christ showed us the way to salvation. And it is the cross of Christ that is the way... the only way.

To summarize the Parable of the Wedding Feast, God sent His Son into the world, and the very people who should have celebrated His coming rejected Him, bringing judgment upon themselves. As a result, the kingdom of heaven was opened up to anyone who will set aside his or her own righteousness and by faith accepts the righteousness God provides in Christ. "Many are invited, but few are chosen." In other words, many people hear the call of God, but only a few heed it. Will you heed the invitation, putting on the righteousness of Christ? When you feel yourself slipping into the grip of false gods, will you repent and return to the LORD? Relying on our God's provision of salvation, will you come?

Let us pray (*from today's Psalm*)...

Amen

\* Text highlighted in blue is taken in whole or in part from:  
<https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-wedding-feast.html>