

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Wedding Banquet"

Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

Opening Hymn: Jesus call us, o'er the tumult 672

Closing Hymn: Softly and tenderly 640

Children's Hymn: Blest are they 624 (choose when to sing chorus)

Choruses: Amazing grace (my chains are gone), You are holy (prince of peace)

Choir: I cannot come to the banquet

Rev. Steve Filyk

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Ever been to a royal wedding?

My father was at a dinner, where Princess Anne was guest.

But that's the closest my family

Has ever come to royalty.

I've never been invited to dine with royalty.

And I've never received a royal wedding invitation

Invitations are reserved for blood relatives

And people in places of honor and power:

Leaders in arts and sports and politics.

But imagine, if you can, imagine you received an invitation

To the marriage of a prince or queen.

What would you do?

There certainly would be a lot of excitement:

You'd tell all your friends.

You share photos of that invite.

But this would be followed by some sober reflection.

Attending a royal wedding would involve

Adjusting your schedule to make room for the holiday.

It would demand scheduling flights and booking hotels.

You would need a shopping trip or two to find suitable attire.

And then you'd need to search for an appropriate gift.

In the end you might send your regrets:

“Sorry, but I cannot come.”

In today's parable Jesus tells a story about the lead-up

To a royal wedding.

Servants are dispatched to the important people

who are invited to share the king's joy

And join the celebration.

But one after another

the would-be guests find reasons for not attending.

Maybe we can empathise with them.

This causes problems for the king.

But rather than scale back the celebration

The king is determined to fill the banquet hall.

This is where the parable takes an unexpected turn.

The king now directs his servant to invite one and all.

Not just people who are important

But everyone who is breathing:

“the bad as well as the good”.

We are told that these revised plans are astonishingly successful
and that the banquet hall is filled.

The parable continues to tell us

About one invitee who arrived at the wedding

Without the right dress, the correct attire:

Apparently he thought he just grab the free meal

Without bothering to dress appropriately.

The king who so graciously extended all these invitations,

Is not impressed with this man

Who didn't prepare for the occasion:

The king has him tossed from the banquet.

Now this is an interesting parable,

though to our modern ears

Not completely comprehensible.

What is Jesus teaching with this parable?

What is Jesus trying to say?

To his original listeners,

The first part of his parable

Would be a clear allusion Israel

And God's promise of a Messiah.

“Everyone would know what a story about a landowner
with a vineyard was referring to;
equally everyone in Jesus’ day would know the point
of a story about a king
throwing a wedding party for his son...

This story is about the coming of God’s kingdom,
and in particular the arrival of the Messiah.”ⁱ

But the second part of his parable
Takes a departure from this well-known narrative.

Those who are invited to share in this long-anticipated kingdom,
actually reject the invitation.

And then, even more astonishingly,
the invitation is extended to everyone.

This part of the parable speaks most directly
to Jesus’ own ministry.

He is the promised Messiah,
who is rejected by the nation’s teachers and leaders,
But is welcomed by those at the bottom
Of everyone’s guest list:

“The tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the riff-raff,
the nobodies, the blind and lame,
the people who thought they’d been forgotten.

They were thrilled that God’s message was for them after all.”ⁱⁱ

But let's put these two parts together.

By telling a well-known story about the promised Messiah,
And connecting it with his own unique ministry,
Jesus is effectively telling a bigger story about God.

These sections combine to teach us that God's grace is relentless.
If those who seem most deserving won't welcome God's promises
God will offer it to others.

God won't leave this gift unwrapped,
It will be passed around until someone receives it!

PAUSE

Many of us understand that we have benefited
from God's relentless grace.

God went searching for us,
When we weren't looking.

We are that branch that has been grafted in to the people of Israel
Not because we were waiting for it,
Nor because we deserved it,
but because God's grace is so wildly immense.

But if the first two sections of the parable
Teach us that God's grace is relentless,
What are we to make of that third section,
That seeming 'add-on' about wedding clothes?

You might have found it strange

That a generous king would throw a person out of his celebration,
For simply not wearing the correct attire
Especially given the fact that he had extended
His invitation to all the riff-raff (you and me).

But consider that even in our modern-age of casual attire
We still know something about being prepared,
And dressed for an occasion.

The same people who will come to church in jeans and a t-shirt
Will be dressed to the nines for a wedding.

And if you were going to a Royal Wedding?

Well just consider that

“In 2011 the queen issued a 22-page etiquette guide
for the 1,900 guests invited
to Prince William and Kate Middleton’s wedding.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Among the demands for dress include requests that:

“Shoulders should be covered,
hemlines should be on the conservative side,
[shoes closed-toe]...
[and] Ladies should be wearing a hat...

For men, 'morning dress' is the daytime formal dress code...
most gentlemen [would] be suited in a morning coat,
waist coat, tie and striped trousers.”^{iv}

But before we get too focused on fabric
remember that this is a parable.

Ultimately Jesus is less concerned about the length of our skirts
And more concerned about the condition of our souls.

Elsewhere Scripture advises us to:

“get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander,
and abusive language from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another,
seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices
and have **clothed** yourselves with the new self...

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility,
meekness, and patience...
Above all, **clothe** yourselves with love...”^v

What Jesus is teaching us in this parable
Is that the glorious occasion of the arrival of God’s kingdom,
Demands new sorts of behavior from us.

God’s grace is relentless but it also begs for transformation.

“The Gospel is not the announcement that any of us
is just fine the way we are.
Rather, God loves so much
that he will not leave us unchanged.”^{vi}

I think we know this intuitively.
As theologian NT Wright argues:

“nobody really believes
that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are.

God loves serial killers and child-molesters;
God loves ruthless and arrogant businessmen;
God loves manipulative mothers
who damage their children’s emotions...

But the point of God’s love
is that he wants them to change.^{vii}

God has for all of us,
A much better way.

So what are you going to do with that RSVP to God’s banquet.
And maybe, more importantly,
what new qualities are you going to put on,
before you get there?

ⁱ NT Wright *Matthew: Part 2* 83

ⁱⁱ NT Wright *Matthew: Part 2* 84

ⁱⁱⁱ “What Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s Guests Need to Know About Royal Wedding Protocol

Plus the mistakes guests like Victoria Beckham made in the past” by NATALINA LOPEZ MAY 18, 2018

<https://www.townandcountrymag.com/the-scene/weddings/g18929635/royal-wedding-guest-etiquette-protocol/>

^{iv} Ibid

^v Colossians 3:8-14 NRSV

^{vi} Leonard R. Klein “Matthew 22:1-14” *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels*, 128

^{vii} NT Wright *Matthew: Part 2* 84