

Sermon – The Parable of The Wedding Banquet

Matthew 22: 1-14

1. Introduction

- a. Last week, I learned a valuable lesson about Thanksgiving and the role of gratitude in our lives.
- b. Elaina and I are in a monthly dinner group with six of our friends. We have lively discussions on all sorts of topics and have grown quite close.
- c. Since none of our family members live close by, we made plans to celebrate Thanksgiving Day this year by going out to dinner at a restaurant tonight with friends.
 - i. We invited a couple from our dinner group to join us. They responded with appreciation . . . but regretted that they already made other plans.
 - ii. A bit disappointed, but undeterred, we invited a second couple from our group to join us. They responded promptly with gratitude and joyfully accepted our invitation.
 - iii. We were delighted . . . thankful that we would be able to enjoy their company and celebrate Thanksgiving with good friends.
- d. Thanksgiving is not just about a celebration of our many benefits and the bounty that we enjoy. It's also about celebrating relationships and the love we give and receive with those with whom we share our lives.
 - i. In our case, both couples expressed their gratitude for our invitation; for our thinking of them and wanting to include them in our celebration.
 - ii. We felt their gratitude . . . and we were joyous when our invitation was immediately accepted by the second couple.
 - iii. So each of us, in our responses, confirmed how we value of our friendships and let each other know that we care.
 - iv. So, my lesson from this Thanksgiving Day experience is that relationships, grounded in gratitude, are a necessary and vital part of a vibrant, wholesome life.
- e. How does our Gospel text today reveal the importance of gratitude in creating and sustaining wholesome relationships?

2. Context. To answer this question, let's consider the context of today's Gospel text.

- a. Two weeks ago, Walter did a wonderful job describing the context of Jesus teaching at the temple when he was approached by the Chief Priests and

Pharisees who questioned Jesus' authority. Jesus told them the **Parable of the Two Sons** which criticized them for not believing John the Baptist.

- b. That was followed last week by the **Parable of the Landowner's Vineyard** where the tenants, instead of being grateful for the Landowner's generosity in providing them a fertile field and all the equipment they needed to grow a plentiful crop, they thought only of themselves and killed those who the Landowner sent to collect his rightful portion of the produce, including his son. The religious leaders realized that he was speaking of them and wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid to do so.

3. Today's Text.

- a. This week, we have the **Parable of the Wedding Banquet** where Jesus continues to criticize the religious leaders for their failure to recognize God's intent for inclusivity and abundance . . . for all!
 - i. They lived in an old, rigid paradigm that viewed God's love and support as conditional . . . that had to be earned through specific acts, observances, and restrictions that they scrupulously created and enforced from their positions of power and privilege.
 - ii. They had all the answers, lived in a closed system, and weren't thankful for the Good News that Jesus offered.
- b. Jesus tries to wake them up to a new reality. He compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a King giving a wedding banquet for his son.
 - i. He sends out invitations to those he wanted to come and join in the celebration of his son's wedding.
 - ii. This is a very special and joyous occasion. The King wanted to share his joy with his guests.
 - iii. But none of those invited would come.
 - iv. So, he sent his slaves out to personally invite them, telling them of all the elaborate preparations that awaited them – it would be a great celebration. Come! Join me in celebrating! . . .
 - v. Were they grateful to be included in the King's celebration? Keep in mind that this is THE KING – not some ordinary person that they could simply ignore. But ignore him they did!
 - vi. They were not grateful for being invited.
 - 1. Actually, they made light of it!
 - 2. Some when on their way – one to his farm, another to his business – while the rest mistreated and killed the slaves.

3. Their relationship with the King meant nothing to them. It was as if he was nothing in their eyes.
 4. Worse, they not only snubbed him, they mistreated and killed his slaves!
 5. No wonder he was enraged and judged them as “not worthy”.
- vii. The King then invited everyone to the wedding banquet. He instructed his slaves to gather everyone they could find – both good and bad.
- viii. Finally, we find that one man who came was not wearing a wedding robe.
1. Now this is a bit strange to our ears. A wedding robe??
 - a. One of the notable customs in ancient Jewish weddings was the provision of festive garments for the guests at the door.
 - b. It was expected dress for a formal event like the wedding of the King’s son.
 - c. Refusing or failing to wear the provided garment signaled severe disrespect to the host.
 - d. So it wasn’t that this man couldn’t afford a wedding robe. He simply refused the one offered to him.
 2. Notice that the King addressed the man as “Friend” and inquired how he got in without a wedding robe. The man was speechless.
 3. Since he addressed him as “friend”, the King may have been open to a reasonable explanation. But when none came, he took offence and had the man thrown out “to utter darkness”.
- ix. So, what does it mean to be “worthy” if both good and bad people are invited, yet when a man shows up without a wedding dress he is expelled “to utter darkness”?
- x. What was Jesus saying to the religious leaders? What does it mean to be “worthy” in this context? What does it mean for us today?
- xi. So let’s unpack this a little more . . .
- c. What if, in this parable, Jesus is not equating “worthiness” to being good or bad . . .? What if “the wedding robe” in today’s text is not to be taken literally, but rather metaphorically – not as a literal robe, but how we conduct ourselves in our relationship to God and to others? For example,
- i. Living our lives grounded in love and gratitude for our relationships with everyone we meet – no matter their status in life or what advantage they can offer us,

- ii. Demonstrating our fidelity to each relationship with respect, honor, and appropriate responses – as each of the couples in our group did to our invitation . . . and
 - iii. Exhibiting the Fruits of the Spirit that Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”
 - iv. If we do this, then perhaps we will experience the joyfulness that Paul describes in our Epistle reading today from Philippians:
 - 1. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice!” . . . Be joyful!
 - 2. “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”
 - . . . In other words, live in the spirit of Gentleness: one of the Fruits of the Spirit.
 - 3. Recognize that the Lord is near, there’s no need to worry.
 - 4. Just let your prayerful requests be known to God . . . with thanksgiving!
 - . . . That is, be in grateful relationship with God . . . in who you are and in all that you do.
 - v. And if we do this, we are assured that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
- 4. In a fourth century text, The Book of Decrees, by an unknown author, three churches are described: (1) First, there is the visible church that most people know, like we have here today, (2) Then there is the celestial church before the throne of God, which most people believe in, and (3) Third, between the first two, lies a second reality: the invisible, inner church of the heart that few people discover.
 - a. Cistercian monk, André Louf, comments on this inner church:

“When we wake up at three in the morning, perhaps stirred by anxiety or perhaps awakened by grace, this [inner] church always remains open. We can enter simply by giving thanks: for gifts and struggles, for bodies growing older, for family and friends, fears and failures, joys and losses. Gratitude has an immediate effect. It calms and quiets; it opens and releases.”
 - b. It’s the same reality that Paul is pointing to in our text from Philippians today:
 - i. He urges his readers to let their requests be known to God with thanksgiving.
 - ii. Isn’t that the “wedding robe” of today’s text?
 - iii. To come to the Banquet of Life wearing a robe of gratefulness that honors each occasion with appropriate presence and action.

- iv. By simply being grateful for everything – the good and the bad – we are prepared to meet each moment in its fullness, confident that the Grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is with us.

5. Conclusion

As we approach Thanksgiving Day, we turn our thoughts to our many blessings and feel the joy that comes from the loving relationships that we cherish.

Let us go forth today to celebrate Thanksgiving this year with gratitude and joy for our friends, our family, this vibrant, loving community, and for all our many blessings!

AMEN