

### **Sermon: October 11, 2020**

And another one... The kingdom of heaven is like... Remember, the kingdom of heaven is not only a place after we die but more a way of life right here, right now... on earth. Jesus fires off one parable after another answering that first question from the Jewish Leaders. "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" The parable we hear today is another attempt.

Jesus' stories don't answer the question so much as put the Jewish Leaders in their place. The leaders use Jewish law and tradition to keep the status quo. They know who God is and how to be right with God. In addition, they keep the general population calm and peaceful so the Roman government will retain the leaders in power. Power that includes a nice standard of living. It's a win-win for Rome and the leaders. Not so good for the people at large. What is the new thing God's doing that the Jewish leaders miss?

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gives a wedding banquet for his son. Remember all the fuss over the royal wedding of Kate and Prince William? I know people who woke up in the middle of the night to catch it live.

And we don't even HAVE a royal family. Can you imagine getting an invitation to the royal wedding and NOT going? That's what happens. The king sends invites to the VIPs in the kingdom and they don't come.

Second invitation includes a description of the menu and the entertainment line-up. Some of the invitees LAUGH at the invitation, others are too busy with their own affairs to bother and worst of all, just like the last few parables, some kill the slaves.

The king gets so mad that an army is dispatched, and the city left in ruins. Once again, we find the violence hard to hear. It's especially hard to hear when we equate the king in the parable to God.

Yet don't you know people who ignore the invitation of the king and their lives end up empty and without meaning even when they look successful on the surface by the world's standards? Something to think about.

And then the unexpected happens... I have a friend who sarcastically will say "And you are surprised how?" when I share a story about family drama.

This is the THIRD parable. You would think the Jewish Leaders would have figured out by now the king does NOT give up.

The VIPs aren't worthy. The king wants the hall filled so he sends out his slaves again with more invitations. Did you notice? The king invites EVERYONE - good AND bad. That makes me sit up! Good and bad?!? Then, what makes somebody worthy?

From the parable, the only answer is simply showing up. That's grace! It's God who cares and forgives and surrounds us with love that makes us worthy. Not our money, our status, our political party, our nationality or the color of our skin or (and this is hard to hear) our being good. The ONLY thing that makes us worthy is that God loves us!

And God loves us too much to allow us to stay there. So the parable continues. Everyone is having a great time and... oops! somebody is standing off in the corner without the proper attire.

In that ancient culture, there is some thought that in elite circles the king would have provided the wedding robe. That's an interesting twist! The man accepts the king's invitation and then refuses to put on a robe that is GIVEN to him. Is that any worse than not coming at all?

Remember we're listening to the parable not to point fingers at historical figures – the Jewish leaders – but to hear the challenge meant for us. And there IS a challenge. It's really hard to hear and yet keeps coming up over and over. It's not enough to RSVP to the party and simply show up.

The wedding garment, which represents who we are clothed in Christ, DOES matter. What we DO doesn't make us WORTHY. God's free invitation and gift of love and forgiveness SAVES us. AND we are invited, dare I say expected, to open our heart spaces and allow that love to transform and change us so our attitudes and behaviors are reflections of Christ. We are freed from our egos and our bondage to self to truly and fully love.

As much as we don't want to hear it, accountability IS a part of discipleship. If we were on trial for being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us? What do your Facebook, twitter and snap chat comments look like? How do you respond to people who don't agree with you politically? If somebody could see inside your front door what would they see in the way you interact with your spouse, or children or others in your home? How do you act with the people you work with, your neighbors, or in the church?

The challenge is daunting! It seems impossible because it is. We can't possibly live as followers of Jesus by our own unsteady will power. That's why Jesus gave us a most incredible gift. He promises to be with us always. One way that happens is in the feast we celebrate every Sunday here at Trinity – Holy Communion.

Jesus took the bread and wine of the Passover feast and changed that old covenant to a new covenant, established on the cross. God invites you to nourish and nurture your soul and spirit at this new banquet. Holy Communion is just that. Holy – Sacred, having to do with God. Communion – Intimate sharing of thoughts and feelings. We share ourselves - thoughts and feelings - intimately with Jesus.

Holy Communion is more than a rote act of taking a snippet of bread and sip of wine or juice. Even with the pre-packaged kits which can be a pain to open, God invites you to see and experience more. When you receive Holy Communion take an intentional breath, forget the inconvenience, and focus on the God connection. You are taking Jesus into your very cells.

God loves you! God loves you exactly as you are right now. That's grace! God loves you too much to allow you to stay there. That's love! God's only desire is for you to grow in love to become the self you were meant to be all along. God has already sent your invitation to the party, life in God's kingdom. Come! The Banquet is already prepared.