

“Come to the Marriage.”

Text: Matt 22:1-14

Suggested Hymns:

331, 303, 477T568, 320, 327

1) Christianity is essentially joyful

2) The mood of those who reject it

3) The condition of those who accept it

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:1-14, ¹ *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:* ² *“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³ and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.*

⁴ *Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’”*

⁵ *But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶ And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.*

⁷ *But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ ¹⁰ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

¹¹ *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This is a very familiar Gospel Reading. In a parable we have here a description of God's efforts through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to win back sinners to Himself and to their salvation.

In picture language we are reminded here of the marriage that the Father in heaven is preparing for His Only-begotten Son, the salvation that awaits us at the end of time.

God is pictured as issuing invitations to this marriage first to the chosen people, the Jews, who, however, make light of the invitation and treat the servants who bring the invitations to them spitefully. God is offended, and therefore sends His invitation out to the Gentiles and so fills His house with guests.

At the end, the Gospel gives us a glimpse of the company of the saved, reminding us of the fact that there is a garment needed to participate in that great marriage feast, the garment that the Bridegroom Himself furnishes, the garment that is made white in the blood of the Lamb, the garment that makes the sinner right in the sight of God, the garment of the righteousness of Christ, the Son of God.

It is a familiar Gospel among us, which rings with that cheering appeal and call: — "Come to the Marriage."

Let us contemplate this invitation by emphasising the following points: — Christianity is essentially joyful, the mood of those who reject it, and the condition of those who accept it. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Christianity Is Essentially Joyful.

The Gospel invitation in our lesson is an invitation to something cheerful and happy. That is Christianity. It is joy, peace, rest; paradise, the kingdom of God.

In an art gallery there is an exhibit on different walls, two pictures of religious experience or expression. In the one picture we see a lot of stern-faced, sorrow-smitten priests turned to a wall, praying. In the other we see a family about a table, praying, their faces lighted with a heavenly radiance, upturned to Him who, though not seen, is yet known as the Father in heaven. Some one has

referred to these two pictures as the presentation of two types of practical Christianity.

In reality it is not so. We do not, indeed, forget the fact that the consciousness of sin is depressing and that the crushed spirit and the broken heart are the sacrifices that are pleasing to God. But, after all, they are only the precursors that lead the sinner to the cross of Jesus.

Bowing at that cross, however, there comes to the sin-laden penitent the vision that brings rest to his soul; the conviction and the consciousness that God is love, that for Jesus' sake God forgives sin, that now, indeed, there is no more condemnation, that through Christ we are free from sin's guilt and power, and that we are God's redeemed children and joint heirs with Christ.

Yes, in reality only that is Christianity which grasps and holds firmly the joy that God offers sinners through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We may therefore well say that as a sinner the Christian is sorrowful, but that as a Christian he is essentially joyful. Christianity is essentially the marriage that unites the Saviour and the sinner, God and man.

In this way Christianity proclaimed in the Garden of Eden — deliverance, reunion with the Creator. Likewise through Moses and the prophets, through many types and symbols. Out of Egypt into the Promised Land. The Temple, the mercy-seat, and the Holy of Holies.

The Gospel of joy is proclaimed at Christ's birth with these words — *“Do not be afraid,” “good tidings,”* and *“great joy.”*¹

2. The Mood Of Those Who Reject It.

The mood of those invited are expressed in the phrases, *“They were not willing to come.”* *“They made light of it.”* They were careless. Remember Pharaoh, Pilate, and Herod. They were indifferent, preoccupied, and prejudiced.

Our text says, ⁵ *But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.* ⁶ *And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.* So were the Jews, God's chosen people. Some would not come in God's way. They would run along in their own way, without the Saviour's wedding-garment.

Our text says, ¹¹ *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ “For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

It is like this today. This is the mood, the manner, of those who reject Christianity. They either will not at all, or they will not in God’s way heed the Gospel invitation.

3. The Condition Of Those Who Accept It.

It was an ancient custom that the bridegroom provided a white garment for the invited guests, which they must all use. The invited guests rejoiced to accept and to wear this wedding-garment.

Just so in Christianity. This is the custom, and, indeed, the necessary custom, since the deplorable moment that man became unworthy to appear in the presence of His God in his own unrighteousness.

There remained no other way but to cover man’s unrighteousness if he would ever again enter into harmony and communion with God. God Himself found this way and provided the righteousness of God, revealed in the Gospel from faith to faith.

We read in Romans 1:16–17, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*

Likewise in Romans 3:21–22, ²¹ *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*

These righteous garments are given to us in Holy Baptism, as we read in Galatians 3:27, ²⁷ *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* In other words *“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

This is the precious wedding-garment, the righteousness provided by God through Jesus Christ. Christians joyfully receive this wedding-garment and wear it.

Christians rejoice as we read in Revelation 19:7, ***Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come.***

Let us recap this parable. Jesus told this parable on Tuesday of Holy Week. He is saying that Good Friday will most certainly be followed by Easter Sunday.

That point may have gone right over the heads of the disciples at the time, but after Jesus' resurrection, when He explained the Scriptures, they were able to see things they had missed before. And that is one good reason why we should read the Scriptures over and over again.

The Apostle John was given a glimpse of this wedding, which he records in Revelation 19:7-9 and 21:2. CHRIST is the bridegroom,² and the CHURCH is His bride. Husbands and wives will no longer be married to each other in heaven, as Jesus says in Matthew 22:30. God intends our earthly marriages to be a preparation for and a foretaste of the wedding feast in heaven.

The people who are invited first are the Jews. When they refuse the king's invitation, the Gentiles are invited. In this parable Jesus warns both Jews and Gentiles that judgement will surely fall upon all who show contempt for God's gracious invitation.

The Jews show their contempt in two ways: some were indifferent, ignored them, made light of it, paid no attention, and refused to listen to the messengers and went about their business, while others actively mistreated the servants and killed them.

The Gentiles show their contempt by failing to wear the wedding clothes the king has provided. The former are killed and their city is burned (a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70), while the latter are thrown out into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, an expression Jesus often uses for the eternal suffering of hell.³

This is the same invitation Jesus issues in a subsequent parable, ***“Enter into the joy of the Lord!”***⁴

And the bountiful table the king has prepared is the same feast Jesus referred to earlier in Matthew 8:11, ***“And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”*** A foretaste of this feast is offered to us in the Sacrament of the Altar.

All of the people who were invited to the king’s banquet are unworthy of his invitation. When the original invitees refused to come, the king said to his servants, ***“those who were invited were not worthy.”*** So he sent his servants out into the streets to invite anyone they could find. This is the evangelistic mission of Christ’s church, which began already on Good Friday, as the penitent thief, and the Roman centurion were moved to confess their faith in Jesus.⁵

Every sinner who receives this invitation in penitent faith must confess together with Martin Luther, *“I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”*

The man who was not wearing wedding clothes calls to mind the traditional prayer of preparation for Holy Communion, *“Strip off from us the spotted garments of our flesh, and of our own righteousness, and adorn us with the garments of the righteousness that Christ has purchased with His blood.”*

In a similar way the hymnist wrote,⁶

I fall asleep in Jesus’ wounds,
There pardon for my sins abounds;
Yea, Jesus’ blood and righteousness
My jewels are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I’ll stand
When I shall reach the heavenly land.

Here on earth, to be sure, the hypocrite may run along in Christian ranks without putting on this wedding-garment, and he may reject Christ’s righteousness and trust in his own character and works.

But on that great day of the marriage-feast there shall be no deception. The Lord shall know His own.

Oh, for the joy of Christianity! Oh, for the wedding-garment of Christ's righteousness! Yes, "Come to the marriage." Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 2:10

² See Matthew 9:15

³ See Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30

⁴ Matthew 25:21, 23

⁵ See Luke 23:40-43; Matthew 27:54

⁶ Hymn 477