

Sermon Matthew 22:1-14 17th S af Pent

Sermon: 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 22: 1-14: The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Theme: Dinner is ready!

Goal: God has everything prepared and invites all. Let us not miss the opportunity!

Dear Friends,

Introduction: I was a young pastor when I and Lídia were invited to have dinner with the Governor of the State of São Paulo in the State Palace, together with several other church ministers. I put on my best suit, Lídia sewed a new dress for herself, I took with me a Concordia Book as a gift to the Governor, and there we went! It was a big honor for us to be invited for such an important meeting! We couldn't miss that opportunity!

Jesus talks about a big party in this Parable. It is the wedding of the King's Son! God is the King; Jesus is His Son; the first guests invited are the Jews of the Old Testament; the other guests are all people – we included too.

I - The wedding party

Perhaps the biggest and most important party in our lives was our wedding party. It was similar in the biblical time as well. And God uses that image of happiness to illustrate His Kingdom and the free salvation He has prepared for all. It's a big feast, with lots of food and drink!

The Old Testament lesson for today, Isaiah 25:6-9, says: “The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest wines.” And the explanation follows. What does this mean?: The Lord “will swallow up death forever”... and “will wipe away the tears from all faces”. - Revelation 21:3-4 matches with this text when it describes the heaven and says: “The Lord will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no death or

mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
(This is my favorite passages about heaven!)

Psalm 23, the most beloved Psalm, (we read it today) speaks about a feast as well: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” God is generous and gives in abundance!

Even the Lord's Supper is a banquet. In an optional Order of Service we sing: *“Let this be a foretaste of all that is to come, when all creation shares this feasts with you.”* - Jesus said to His disciples when He celebrated the Lord's Supper for the very first time: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:15-16).

“Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!” - is the invitation of our text. - When Jesus cried on the cross: “It is finished!” (John 19:30), this is just what it means in our text: “Everything is ready!” God's salvation plan for us was prepared in many details, and everything was fulfilled in Christ, our Savior. We don't need to do anything and we cannot do anything. It would be an offense to the King if we offered to bring some food to the banquet, - this means, to cooperate our own works and deeds into the salvation that Jesus had performed completely! This is *“salvation by grace alone”, “without any merit or worthiness in me”* (Small Catechism).

One of the pillars on which Dr. Martin Luther based his Reformation Movement is: *SOLA GRATIA, by Grace Alone*. We need to be aware that we are unable to do anything to enter the Kingdom of God, - the banquet hall - and we need to be sure that we shall not try to enter by ourselves. God has prepared everything and He invites us to enter by grace. We can just believe that we are invited and we have nothing to do but accept His invitation to the wedding banquet!

And one more thing: We do not need to worry about our clothes. God provides new and nice clothes for His guests. He cleans us from all dirt and unrighteousness in the water of the Baptism, and gives us the righteousness of Christ as a new robe for the feast! - Sometimes we put a white robe on the child just after he/she is baptized, symbolizing that he/she has just been covered by Jesus' righteousness.

Hymn 362 from the Lutheran Worship says: *“Jesus, your blood and righteousness / My beauty are, my glorious dress;/ Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, / With joy shall I lift up my head./ Bold shall I stand in that great day, / Cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay; / For by your cross absolved I am/ From sin and guilt, from fear and shame.”*

God's grace is still active and His invitation to the banquet is still valid for all. As we have received the invitation and have accepted it, let us invite others to come with us to God's big feast!

II – The guests

Unfortunately many invited guests despise the invitation and miss the opportunity to enter God's house and to enjoy the happiness God has prepared for us in His Kingdom.

A) - The first ones who were invited were the Jewish people of the Old Testament. The message of this parable is very similar to the Parable of last Sunday. There, the Tenants in the Vineyard were not faithful and didn't deliver the fruits to the owner, they seized the servants sent by the landowner and eventually killed His Son. - Here, the invited guests “paid no attention to the invitation and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized the servants, mistreated them, and killed them.”

“The king was enraged! He sent His army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” - This is a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 AD. *“We cannot mock the Gospel invitation”* (LCMS A p. 129).

B) - The second invited guests are *“all the peoples”*, as Jesus sent His disciples after His resurrection to “preach the Gospel to all mankind. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16, Good News Bible). *“The Lord invites all without exception to the banquet. The Gospel of salvation goes out to the world. The apostles and their successors go to the four corners of the world,”* (LCMS A p. 129) – to Cape Town as well.

“But when the King came to see the guests, He noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.” - Some guests insist to come in their own clothes, and don't accept the free offering of Jesus' righteousness. Even if they are in the banquet hall here, - the visible church – God will not allow them to enter the Kingdom in heaven. Only those, who by faith accept the free grace offered by God in Jesus Christ are allowed to be in God's feast.

Conclusion: There is no excuse for rejecting God's free invitation to His feast of salvation. It's a question of priority, of course. For some, *“their worldly affairs are more important;... but we know that they are for now; the Lord's promises are for eternity!”* (LCMS A p. 128-129). What are your priorities? - It is a matter of death and life as well, eternal death and eternal life. God offers us life and happiness in His house, in the Wedding Banquet of His Son, who is engaged to the Church. John saw the beauty of the bride and wrote in Revelation 21: 1-2: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

Let us enjoy with our brothers and sisters the foretaste He offers us in the Holy Communion, in hope of the eternal banquet with all the saints in heaven, by God's grace. Amen.