

Matthew 22:1-14 – Think About These Things – Pentecost 20 – October 11, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

Today's Gospel reading is not the easiest to take. Really, several of our Gospel readings have just been troubling these last few weeks. Jesus tells parables. They are hard to understand. But we can see that they show a separation among Jesus' hearers.

We heard the Parable of the Two Sons and the Parable of the Tenants. Both show a separation of those who respond to the Kingdom of God rightly and those who don't. And the Pharisees can sense that Jesus is talking about them. Even though they should have been so glad at the presence of their Messiah, they have excluded themselves from the kingdom of God.

Such stories were hard for them to hear. But they are hard for us as well. We can see that they have implications for modern hearers—and eternity is at stake.

And so, these texts require our careful consideration. It would be foolish to simply dismiss them—or to ignore them—or to have no place for them. We can't just tune out and pretend that Jesus didn't say them. These are the words of Jesus. Matthew thought they were important enough to record. And the Holy Spirit intended them for us all. We should think about these things—as Paul says.

Remember in the Old Testament when Jacob's name gets changed to Israel. Israel then is the name of God's chosen people. It is through his family that God would save the world in Jesus. But the name means, "one who wrestles with God." You know the story. But this wrestling should mark us too. This is what it means to be the people of God. We wrestle with God's Word. We should unwilling to let go, until we receive its blessing.

Theologians often talk about the perspicuity of the text. And it just means that the Bible is clear. And there is something to this idea. The core message of God rescuing us from sin in Jesus can be understood by children. But there is also a hiddenness and depth to the text that must be explored. The Bible is mysterious sometimes. Or it is easy enough to understand, but hard to take.

St. Gregory the Great once said, "The Scriptures are deep enough for an elephant to swim in and shallow enough for a child to wade through." I agree.

When the Bible is hard, we are prone to overly simplify it, explain it away, or ignore it all together. We are tempted to even judge it.

This is a growing trend in Christianity today—especially in the liberal mainline churches—but I am seeing it among the non-denominational and Pentecostal churches too. They take the difficult portions of Scripture and suggest that Peter and John and Paul—and even Jesus—are wrong—or out-of-date. Certainly, our generation must know better than theirs. We are so much more moral and enlightened after all.

And so, all of this is to say, let's wrestle with our text today. Let's take it for what it is—the Word of God. And let's let it mess with us too. It's how the Pharisees should have listened. But before judging them, let's remember to take it seriously ourselves. There may be something here that confronts us. But there is also grace for us who hear this text rightly.

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.” Remember, that as we listen to parables, there is often a surprising detail. And here, the people reject the invitation to the King’s wedding feast for His Son.

Now, we don’t have kings. But we understand how this works. Imagine you are invited by your favorite athlete, actor, politician, theologian, whatever. This is the event of the year! The food will be fantastic. The music will be perfect. Everything will be glorious. If we are privileged enough to be invited, there is no way that we miss it.

And yet, that is exactly what happens. Even after His servants go out twice to invite everyone. The invited guests paid no attention. They ignored the King. They had their excuses for why they wouldn’t attend—one to his farm, another to his business—maybe there was a football game—there was another guest they didn’t like—maybe it was just a bad day.

In Luke 14, Jesus tells a similar parable. And He gives a little more detail about their excuses. “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”

And thus, they ignored the King. They also slandered the King’s servants—and some they even killed. And here, we should be thinking about John the Baptist. We should think about the plot against Jesus. Jesus’ first hearers certainly were. At first glance the invited guests simply seemed rude and disrespectful. But now we see that they hate Him and would destroy His kingdom if they could.

The result is wrath and judgment. The King is resolute. The violence against His servants will be punished. The image reminds us of the Song of the Vineyard that we heard last week in Isaiah 5. And it all will be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

But the story isn’t done. The first guests did not come. But the King is gracious. The wedding feast stands ready. And so, He commissions His servants to go out into the streets and invite anyone and everyone that they can find—both the good and bad. And eventually the wedding hall is filled with guests.

Again, the symbolism is easy to follow. These guests are the ordinary people—people who had no relationship with the King. The Gospel goes out to the Gentiles—nations and peoples who seemed so far removed from the King. Isaiah predicted this. And Paul himself will serve to take the Gospel to the Gentiles—people like us. All flesh shall see the salvation of God in Jesus Christ.

But the story still has one more element—and it is also shocking. The King comes to inspect His guests. And notices that one man is not dressed appropriately for the wedding feast. His address takes a cordial tone initially, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?”

But the man has nothing to say. He is speechless. And since he is unfit for the banquet, the King’s servants tossed him outside, “into the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The guest was invited—but he wasn’t ready. He was not dressed respectfully. As a result, the Host cast him out.

The parable hints at the reality of eternal exclusion from the blessed presence of God. It forecasts the eternal punishment that Jesus will address in Matthew 24 and 25 more fully. The darkness and weeping represent what we commonly call hell—although it is best to reject simplistic understandings of hell. The parable reminds us that not all who are part of the visible Church, are members of the true Church. Eventually, they don't show up, they leave, or they don't care—and finally they are cast out.

Paul deals with all of this in 2 Thessalonians 1, “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”

But what do wedding clothes represent? There are two answers. In Revelation, the wedding clothes are the righteousness of Christ. In eternity, God's people are dressed in white robes. They became white when washed in the blood of the lamb—a reference to Holy Baptism—rightly received.

Although the image shifts slightly, Revelation 19 makes another claim, “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

So then, the garment seems to be both the passive righteousness that we have by faith in Christ—and the active righteousness that must follow in the life of one who has faith in Christ. Christians live as disciples. And following Christ is our necessary response.

The parable makes this vital point about God. He invites all kinds of people to join His kingdom. He desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He offers life to the secular and religious, foolish and wise, sinners and saints, male and female, Jews and Gentiles.

And in our reading, the first round of invitations—the invitations that are rejected, neglected, and ignored—teach that the rejection of God's offer is true rebellion—which God eventually punishes. It leaves us in the condemnation of our sin.

The second round of invitations teach us that many different kinds of people can enjoy God's offer. Yet, those who come to God must come in truth. They must be prepared to stand before the Lord. True faith in Jesus Christ is necessary. He gives His righteousness to us which is received by faith. But true discipleship—following Jesus—must follow. As Jesus says in Matthew 10, “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

So it comes to us. As Jesus says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Our Formula of Concord, in the Book of Concord explains this line, “This does not mean that

God is unwilling to save everybody. But the reason some are not saved is as follows: they do not listen to God's Word at all."

Though God genuinely invites every person to His eternal feast, some outright reject His invitation—and so fail to enjoy its richness. Others simply ignore His invitation—but the outcome is the same. I think this is the most common response in our day. We think we have something better to do—than give ourselves over to eternal things. To wrestle with the things of God.

And let's be clear, coming from a long line of Lutherans does not guarantee anyone a place in God's kingdom. Pride, ingratitude, and presumption ever threaten to lead us away. Though we in no way deserve mercy, the Gospel earnestly invites us to respond—to see His heavenly invitation for what it is—to join the Lord in His eternal heavenly banquet

And you have probably noticed that I have hinted at our Church attendance as an application of this parable. Let's stop the excuses. And let's not be casual and occasional attenders. Eternity is far too important. It is as Jesus says in Matthew 7, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Remember that the Divine Service is a foretaste of the feast to come. They are intimately connected. Here, God prepares us for His eternal banquet. He forgives our sins. He clothes us in the righteousness of Christ. He keeps us in that righteousness. And He has comforting and sometimes difficult readings with which He wants us to engage. He wants us to think His thoughts after Him.

Let me conclude with two passages that will help us apply our reading today. I like the way we hear this in Psalm 1 even though the imagery is different. Our closing hymn is just a paraphrase of this Psalm.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

"The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Hebrews 10 is also helpful, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+