



Sunday October 11, 2020  
Matthew 22:1-14 (Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Pastor Tony Acompañado

### An Invitation

There's an Arabian fable which tells about a man who went to his neighbor and asked to borrow a rope. "I can't lend it to you, because I'm using it to tie up a pile of sand," his neighbor answered. The man responded, "but, you can't tie up a pile of sand with a rope." To which his neighbor slyly replied, "Oh, yes you CAN. In fact, *you can do anything with a rope* when you don't wish to lend it to your neighbor." How's that for an excuse?!

Our gospel text this morning is yet another parable in a series of parables in which Jesus teaches about the kingdom of heaven. If you remember the last two weeks, there was the parable about the father who had two sons, and asked one of them to go into the vineyard, but he said no and then changed his mind while he asked the other son who initially said yes, but then didn't go as promised. And then there was the parable about the vineyard where the renters didn't want to give the fruit of the vineyard to the owner's servants. And the vineyard was taken from them and given to others. Now, I don't know about you, but I've got a feeling Jesus is trying to make a point here, because wouldn't you know it, the parable we heard this morning also deals with the kingdom of God.

Jesus says the kingdom of God can be compared with a king who gave a marriage feast and invited an extensive list of special guests. But the guests were all too busy to attend, so the king told his servants to go out into the streets and invite anyone they see. In the end, what matters is that the king hosted a banquet, but not just any ordinary banquet, rather a royal one and one for which the king spared no expense and could in fact be characterized as the most extravagant of all banquets – and yet, those chosen guests rejected their invitations.

Today's parable uses the figurative language of an imaginary story about some literal truths — truths that are meant to shock us into our spiritual senses. In this case, all the invited guests had excuses not to attend the banquet. The invited guests weren't interested in the Kingdom of God that Jesus was bringing into the world, and they came up with one excuse after another not to believe in the Kingdom of God which was coming through Jesus Christ.

In this and in every gospel, Jesus speaks to his immediate audience, but he also speaks directly to us, right here and right now. For those in Jerusalem who heard and rejected his words, the destruction of the temple and the wrath of God awaits just over the horizon. For those of us who read and accept his words, a life in Christ will be followed by an eternity of joy.

From beyond the beginning of time, God has known and loved us. He created us to enjoy all the riches of his kingdom. He preserved us with the unifying gift of his commandments. He sent his Son to die for our salvation. He established his church to teach us and to nurture our faith. All of this was done to prepare you and me for the feast. And every day of our lives we are invited anew... to come, to live, to rejoice in the Lord...to praise God and to love our neighbor. Every day the choice is ours...eternal feast or endless famine. Are you coming to the feast or are you staying in your inertia...too wrapped up in your own pride and preoccupation?

Now you'd think that this decision would be a "no-brainer", right? But oh, how often we get it wrong. We're so busy getting and holding, wanting and consuming, that we ignore the invitation placed before us. We're so self-absorbed that we can't hear Christ's constant call. Sure, we'll get to it sometime – but not just yet. And we come up with lots of different excuses – excuses not to come to worship, not to care for our neighbors, not to be mindful of creation, excuses for why we can't let go of our selfishness, and justifying why what we want is more important than what God says we need.

Today's gospel is a reminder that our generous God is above all else – a loving, compassionate, and merciful God who doesn't give up on us, even when we've given up on him. He doesn't stop calling even when we've stopped listening. Every day he is present to us in those around us. He knows our failings and our foolishness, and yet every day he continues to extend the invitation to us again and again. Sometimes I think we live too much in the here and now and forget that we live in a blink of eternity. We ignore that our own physical days are numbered until we regretfully look back wishing for more time...all while missing that the days of the wedding feast are endless.

So, when Jesus starts talking about the kingdom of heaven, we need to recognize that life after death is only part of the picture. Jesus is talking about the reign of God and how it interferes with the way we live our lives now. And this interference from God calls for us to answer in faith, in trust, and in following a path laid before us that leads us from our own self-destruction and instead toward the extravagant banquet that has been prepared for us.

It's this faith that points us in a different direction – a direction away from our own self-guided and self-serving desires and instead toward a destination awaiting with God's abundance intended for our joy and blessing. And this faith is centered on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Shortly before he died from terminal cancer in 2005, seminary professor and pastor Walter Bouman preached a final sermon where he spoke about the freedom of a Christian, and here's what he said: *"The resurrection of Jesus Christ frees us to do more with our lives than simply protect them. We are free to offer them. We are called to love the world, to want clean air and water for everyone, to give ourselves to the service of peace instead of blindly following our leaders in senseless wars, to commit to the cause of justice, especially when our institutions and our country are guilty of injustice. This is a big order he said. But you are free to pursue it by the resurrection of Christ, who has put an end to the dominion of death. We are free for the battle because the victory is already won."*

My dear friends, our loving God is graciously inviting you and me and all of God's children to an eternal life-giving banquet beyond anything we could ever comprehend. A banquet of unity and peace immersed in indescribable love – and you have the freedom to choose what will you do with the invitation. My deepest hope is that you will clothe yourself in the righteousness of Christ, that you will seek first the kingdom of God, that you will live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called – and then as God's honored and cherished guest, you will accept God's invitation and take your seat at the banquet. Amen.