MT Synod Sermon Manuscript for **Sunday, October 15, 2023**

**Pentecost 28: Year A** (Proper 23) Texts: Isaiah 25:1-9; Ps 23; **Philippians 4:1-9;** **Matt. 22:1-14**

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***\**** *= quotes from from The Message*

**The Wedding Feast**

Perhaps you’ve had experience in making a wedding guest list. It’s not an easy task. How many family and friends do we include? How many people can we afford to feed at the reception?…and so on.

As Jesus tells this parable, the storied king will spare no expense for his son’s wedding. So, all the ‘important people’ of the kingdom are invited. Yet, each and every one of them snubs the king’s invitation. From the beginning, we scratch our heads and ask: **What’s going on here?**

Inquiring minds want to know: what is the bigger context of this passage? For starters, we are deep in the book of Matthew: Jesus is in the last days of his earthly ministry— what the church now calls “Holy Week.” The temple authorities have had suspicions about “this Jesus from Nazareth.” Now they’re **infuriated** by Jesus’ recent entry into Jerusalem. Crowds of people shouted “HOSANNA!- he saves us!” all along the way. What an outrageous claim!

By next morning they question him: “**Just who do you think you are?!**

**…Who gave YOU this authority?!”**

At once Jesus answered them with 2 parables; each story formed to jolt their thinking. Indeed, the temple leaders were shaken by parable #1 and parable #2 for the injustice that came to its characters. But to drive home the point Jesus adds,
**Haven’t you read your your Bible?**  Open your eyes: This is God’s chosen time to remove the God’s kingdom from your hands, and give it to a people who will actually live out a kingdom life. Suddenly, they realize Jesus is aiming these stories at them. But they will wait for a more opportune time to arrest him. *( see Matt 21:42-44 / Ps. 118:22-23.)*

That’s where we landed as we opened the pages to Matthew, chapter 22.

Jesus proceeds to tell another parable. As you’ve heard in today’s reading, the 3rd parable tells of a king who invited his chosen guests a wedding feast- not just once, but twice: **“Look, everything is on the table. The prime rib is ready for carving.
Come to the feast!”** \* Again, no response.

Instead of the original guest list, he sends his servants into the busiest parts of town to invite anyone -and everyone- they see. Soon, the entire wedding hall is filled with guests. It’s a mix of peasants and social outcasts who never imagined such a thing: ‘Amazing! Of all people, we are the ones feasting at the king’s table!’ It’s radical inclusiveness at its best. A picture of **“blessed are the poor”** that has sprung into life. *(Matthew 5:3)*

Many a preacher wishes the story ended here. We could proclaim a message of God’s steadfast love and God’s mercy for all people . We wish it was that easy. But, you heard with it your own ears: this message of “good news” changes abruptly. The king utters severe judgement upon one man: ‘**How dare you come in here looking like THAT!’ \*** The man is restrained & banished to outer darkness.

What are we to make of this?

Certainly it’s about more than a man who disobeys the dress code! So, what is he lacking besides the obvious omission of a special garment? …Does he lack mercy toward others- even when great mercy has been extended to him?  The neglectful man remains a mysterious “object lesson” for us to ponder.

Paul’s letter to the Philippines provides some valuable clues, as pertaining to the early church. He warns believers to beware of people in their midst, who function as ‘**‘enemies of the cross, those whose minds are set on earthly things; whose god is the belly;** who show little evidence of Jesus’ mercy and love. (*Philippians 3:17-21.)* Bottom line: by dodging both the message and messiness of the cross, they’ve missed out on experiencing newness of life. They lack mercy and remain focused on self. Tragically, Paul adds, **“their end is destruction**;**”***(Phil 3:17-21.) -*somewhat like the doom of “outer darkness” in Jesus’ parable.

Together, let’s remember this: Jesus stepped closer to the cross each day after that encounter of speaking parables in the temple. And it is the cross of Christ that changes everything: Jesus died for our sake, and rose in new life. This  Risen One poured out God’s Holy Spirit upon us. First to the disciples, and then throughout all generations, as given in baptism, so that we, too, might walk in newness of life.

Indeed, we are all called to go deeper in faith. To see those who remain hungry for mercy, wholeness, and the assurance of God’s love. To listen well and speak God’s compassion. To invite all to the feast of God’s table, where there is an abundance of grace and love.

To grow the church in the way of cross Paul exhorts them:

 **“Rejoice in the Lord always!**

**Be of the same mind. Work together; be inclusive.**

**Let your mercy and gentleness be known to everyone you encounter.**

**Remember: the Lord is near. So, do not worry. Instead, Pray!  Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers,**

**letting God know your concerns.**

**And the PEACE of God will ‘shepherd’ your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”**

Amen.