

The Wedding Crasher

Matthew 22:1-14

Slide: Wedding banquet

When I saw that the Gospel for this Sunday was to be the parable of the Wedding banquet, I was immediately excited. I love this parable, I thought to myself. This is one of my favorites and I rarely get to preach on it. I was really excited...at first.

Then I realized my mistake. I had accidentally switched the story of the Wedding Banquet from the Gospel of Luke with the one we heard today from Matthew's Gospel instead. Once I realized that it was the story from Matthew's Gospel, I was immediately downcast, thinking to myself, "Not the wedding banquet from Matthew! That's the one I hate, not the one I love!"

You see, this same parable Jesus also tells in Luke's Gospel, but it is quite differently told. The Gospels of Luke and Matthew differ on how they heard this parable from Jesus, and given

the contexts of each Gospel, they actually do make sense within. Each interpreter, that is, each Gospel writer, has a different take on how Jesus tells stories, not to mention how the overall story of Jesus Christ is communicated to the community of believers. However, let me tell you why I like Luke's version better, which is the version I thought I originally was going to preach on this morning.

Slide: Luke's Great Feast

In Luke's retelling of Jesus' parable of the Wedding Banquet from Luke chapter 14, we also have a King throwing a party, a banquet for his son who is getting married. In Luke's version, this King also invites many friends and sends servants out to remind the friends that the banquet is beginning. And, just as in Matthew's version Luke has people who give excuses for not coming to the wedding party, but unlike Matthew, the King in Luke's version tells his servants to go out instead to invite the poor, the lame, and the outcast. There is no killing of the

servants, no troops sent in to kill those people who refused the invitation and no surprise ending of a man without a wedding garment, who to his dismay, is thrown out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Gospel of Matthew has so much weeping and gnashing in it, doesn't it.

Luke's version tells of a God I truly can get behind. That version shows us a God that I'd like to think is who we worship - a God who loves those on the margins, those who are often left out, and those maligned in our society. The Jesus of Luke proclaims a peaceable Kingdom where the rich are made low and the poor given good news. No weeping. No gnashing. No preacher banging her head on the pulpit trying to spit something hopeful out when it looks like there isn't any grace.

Slide: The Invitation

But, in further reflection about Matthew's version, it might be significant to know a few things. Up until this

point, Jesus has been telling parables like this one where it appears that God is one angry God, who if you aren't careful, will take the Kingdom away from you if you aren't accountable to God, or dare I say, attempt to usurp the power of the King, who is Christ. Jesus Christ is the true author of all creation and maintains all power and authority - that is clear in Matthew.

And, there is a particular audience in Matthew for which Jesus is speaking. At the beginning of the parable, it says, "Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables." Who is "THEM"? Well, if you are reading the Gospel up until this point, you know that his parables are directed solely to the Chief Priests and Pharisees, those who have been plotting to kill Jesus and who deny the authority of Jesus as Messiah.

So, Jesus isn't actually telling this parable to all people there. He is speaking about them. These are the religious leaders who believe that they have the authority to

speak for God and God's laws. They also believe that it is they, who are the ones righteous before God, not those other sinners who Jesus hangs out with. Having this in mind, we can begin to get a glimpse of God's intense abhorrence for arrogance, false authority, and corruption within the religious community, but likely from all people who proclaim to be righteous but rather abuse their place instead.

Slide: Wedding Garment

Which directs us to the part of the story that most causes us to scratch our heads. What about that guy without a robe on? What kind of a wedding crasher is he? And, why would he deserve the outer darkness? So, some background ought to help here:

Not a ton is understood about wedding rituals from the first century, but it is mostly understood that during the time of Jesus, everyone at a wedding banquet would receive from the host a special robe to put

on. If you came to the party, you got a robe and you were expected to wear that robe. I don't know what the robes looked like, but reasons for wearing it took the pressure off the guests on what to wear, so that if they perhaps did not have proper attire because of their station in life, they would not need to worry, and if they held great wealth, they couldn't use that wealth, status, or personage to outshine the host and bridal couple.

Wearing a robe put everyone on a level playing field, so that the actual persons being honored, the bridegroom and bride would be the only ones truly adorned and given the greatest honor at the table. The attention would be on them and not on anyone else. But, the wedding robe also gave the guests a sense of belonging. They all belonged there at the table because they were all invited. And, because they were invited, they knew their prescribed role:

Slide: Wear the Robe...

Wear the robe. Be in community. Enjoy the party.

Slide: Child's Baptism

This wedding robe that was so apparently prevalent at ancient weddings explains how it came to be that robes also play a prominent role in holy baptism. In the baptismal rite of the ancient church, the very first Christians, after being baptized into Christ, also received a robe, a white robe, to symbolize that they were clothed in Christ, made new in Christ and that no matter whom they were, they were equal in the eyes of Christ. The white robe is still worn today to symbolize all these things.

So when we go through the trouble to place a white garb on a child when they are baptized, that is why. The white funeral pall that is placed on the casket or urn symbolizes the same robe put on at baptism. And, the white robes the acolytes wear, the pastors wear and the assistant ministers wear also symbolize the "wedding robe" given to

us at the banquet, Christ's banquet table. Even though it is currently invisible on all of you, the symbolic nature of being clothed in a robe of righteousness is still present upon you. And, it is an equalizing robe, one that gives us all the same grace no matter our race, gender, class, or background. This same robe gives us a sense of belonging at the banquet. At the table, the rules are the same as the wedding banquet:

Slide: Wear the robe...

Wear the robe. Be in community. Enjoy the party.

Slide: Unhappy man

Except...our parable story for today claims that one person invited to the party didn't get the memo. He's one of those wedding crashers. Either he refused to wear the robe when given one, or he somehow didn't get one. Either way, we are left to scratch our heads about this very difficult story from Matthew's Gospel. It is a story of such an extreme nature that if we are paying

attention we find ourselves shocked by the turn of events. In fact, we even might wonder if this is the same Jesus who in just the last two weeks of our Gospel readings for our worship services, insisted upon forgiveness, mercy, and justice.

But...maybe that's the point. In a lesson that is meant for people who think they are above any blame and criticism, these Pharisees who can't see themselves as self-righteous and instead take on the authority of the King, Jesus Christ himself, are the true wedding crashers. To them, only certain people may be invited to the table and they refuse to put themselves with all others. And not only that, they refuse to wear the robe, placing themselves in the same place of honor as the host.

Ok, so, we aren't Pharisees, or at least I hope not. That was then. This is now. And yet, when push comes to shove, when I put myself in this story, how often have I felt like the one who refused to put on the robe? How often

have I felt like the one in the outer darkness?

It's those moments when I have perhaps considered myself to be better than those other guests who were invited to the banquet or when I don't want to cover myself up with a robe to hide my distinctive nature from others.

It's those moments when I feel I have to do more, be more to be able to earn an invitation to the party, when all I really have to do is come and put on the robe given to me.

It's those moments when I forget that there is a larger purpose than me and my concerns. The robe given me reminds me that I am simply here to be grateful for all that God does.

It's those moments when I forget that the robe is put on daily through Holy Baptism, that no matter what I do, I need that robe. I need the God who also is willing to give it to me new every day even though by the end of that day, I find myself separated

yet again from the very God who loves me. What a gift to know that each day, the robe is still there as we die daily to sin and rise to new life through Holy Baptism.

This story indeed does not make sense to us as modern hearers. Why would we want to deny the invitation to the King and refuse to wear the robe. But, it does make sense when in view of the cross, a cross to where Christ willingly goes, knowing that we cannot come to the banquet or wear the robe without his help, without his sacrifice.

Slide: Jesus clothing man

For, it is Jesus Christ who enters the outer darkness with us and for us. He willingly chose the path of death so that the invitation to the paschal wedding banquet may be ours. It is he, who forsook his own righteousness to give us the robe of righteousness to wear each day through the waters of baptism. It is God's claim upon me and you that covers up our hesitation, our shame, our fear, and even our refusal.

The choir today is singing a piece of music that shows this promise of a banquet, a banquet where all are equal, where no one may claim to crash it as better than others. One of the verses they will sing has these words:

Slide: "For young and..."

"For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song, the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong."

This is the promise. Come to the banquet and receive the robe of righteousness yet one more day.

Slide: Wear the robe...

The invitation is clear: Wear the robe, be in community, and enjoy the party. Amen.