

## Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Pentecost 19, Proper 23, October 11, 2020

### READINGS:

Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalm 23

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And ... he will swallow up death forever." Isaiah 25:6-7*

Good News! The kingdom has been prepared, and it is coming!

Today, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable comparing God's kingdom to a wedding banquet with a list of invited guests. His audience would easily associate this festive meal with the celebration of God's people at the end of time. After all, they regularly heard of God's generosity to his people in the writings of the prophets and in the psalms read at synagogue services.

We read two of these joyful readings from the Hebrew scriptures today.

First, Isaiah speaks of a banquet of rich food and fine, aged wine on the mountain of God. Mourning and death are no more, and every tear is wiped away. Shame is gone; hunger is forgotten. "This is the Lord for whom we have waited," says the prophet; "Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Then, in Psalm 23 the psalmist sings of the same feast. Food is prepared in abundance and the table is spread. Cups are running over. Heads are anointed with oil. Even those who are troublesome will not interfere with this celebration, the psalmist says!

Jesus begins his story with this introduction: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son." That sounds good, but things do not go well.

The custom was for the host to send slaves to invite the chosen guests, and to send them again to tell those invited when dinner was ready, since preparing a feast took many hours. The king in Jesus' story follows custom. The guests are invited not once, but twice! And, they refuse to come, heading off instead to business, or to the farm. Worse, they mistreat and kill the king's slaves.

Refusing to come was to refuse the king's command, and that was treason. Killing his slaves was insurrection, so the king sent troops to put down the rebellion. Then, he sent more slaves out with a very unusual guest list. "Invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet," he tells them. Matthew says the slaves went out into the streets and "gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests."

At this banquet, it seems the issue is not who is invited, but who will CHOOSE to come!

It's easy to see the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees, with their rigidly exclusive point of view, as the first group of guests who refuse to come to the banquet. It's not even too hard to see ourselves among the group of guests, good and bad, gathered from the streets by the king's very inclusive second invitation. "Great," we say, "the banquet in the kingdom of heaven is on, and we are in, and all is well!"

But there is one more problem in Jesus' parable. When the king greets his guests, he sees a man among them without a wedding garment, and he throws him out, into the "outer darkness."

We understand why the first group of guests are not included - they don't even want to come to the party! But why throw out an invited guest because he is not properly dressed?

Father Dennis Hamm, who writes one of my sermon resources, says that attitude and not clothing may account for the guest's dismissal.

"If we are puzzled by the king's singling out a guest caught without a wedding garment, we miss the cultural note that the host of such a wedding feast would supply a closetful of festive garments for the guests, and it is this man's fault that he has not cooperated (none of the other 'street people' seem to be lacking proper attire.)"

So besides answering God's invitation to the feast, what is expected of us?

Saint Paul has some ideas for us in today's reading from his letter to the church at Philippi. Rejoice in the Lord always, he says. Be known for your gentleness. Don't worry, but make requests to God with prayer, and be thankful. Keep on doing what you learned from me.

Maybe having our wedding garments on means expressing our love for God in eagerness to do good for others. Maybe when we have our wedding garments on we really do prefer love, forgiveness, and equality to hatred, revenge, and superiority.

Maybe, as Father Hamm says, "Having one's wedding garment on...means having fed the hungry, having clothed the naked, having housed the homeless, and so on..."

Good News! The kingdom has been prepared, and it is coming!

Maybe at this banquet, putting on Christ is what is meant by being chosen!

O Christ, your father prepared a banquet for us.  
He set a table, killed the fattened calf.  
He gave us the very finest wine.  
And he invited us to come,  
each and every one,  
every single  
one, to  
this  
table  
of plenty.

Oh Jesus,  
what shall we wear?  
Would you be our garment?  
Let us put on your mind and your heart.  
Then we can relish the morsels, savor the wine:  
and taste your love, which is the most beloved of all foods.

Anne Osdieck

Amen.