

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 12, 2005

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 22:1-14

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## **Come to the King's Wedding Feast**

A friend wants to take you deep sea diving. He tells you about all the beauties of the ocean floor. He describes for you the many different colors and animals you will be able to see under the water. He even tells you that he will provide the equipment that you need for the excursion. It is absolutely free. But you tell him that you would rather go without the wet suit and the oxygen tank. Rather perplexed, he looks at you and says, "But you are going to die." You say, "I'm fine. I can handle it. Don't worry about me."

As foolish and shocking as that may sound, how much more shocking it is when Christians refuse the equipment that God gives them for life with him. Sadly, this is sometimes the case even among us. We are called to live in God's kingdom and to serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. But sometimes we turn our back on Christ. We minimize our sin and we refuse to repent of it. We think that our own works will somehow help us in eternity. It is at those times that we need to place the law of God before our eyes and see the seriousness of our sin. We need to see the horrors of relying on our own good works. Sin condemns in the sight of God. Rather than thinking our sin isn't serious, we Christians need to live lives of repentance. We need to be clothed with the perfect life of Christ so that the Father doesn't see our sin, but our Savior and his sacrifice. For those who would refuse such a good gift from the Father, there are consequences.

Jesus spoke about how horrible it is to reject the Father in this parable that he told on the Tuesday of Holy Week. In it he compared the kingdom of heaven to an invitation that had gone out from a king. The king invited many people to his wedding banquet. Sadly, many of those people refused to come. Those people received the king's judgment. At the end of his ministry, Jesus urgently pleads with each and every one of us. Don't refuse the gifts the king offers. The Lord has prepared everything that we need for the feast. It is free. He has graciously sent us an invitation. He has made us worthy to be there.

So dear friends, today let us hear the call of the servants. Come to the king's feast. And let us know two things. First, he sends us the invitation and second, he clothes us for the event. We hear the first half of the parable again from Matthew 22. *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered and everything is ready. Come to the*

*wedding banquet.’ But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.”*

The invitations had gone out and now it was time for this grand feast. The king sent his servants to call everyone who had received an invitation. What an honor to receive an invitation from the king. What an honor to sit at the king’s table and eat with him. Sadly, many people in the parable didn’t see it that way. For some reason this free meal just didn’t appeal to them. But the king didn’t care. He sent his servants out a second time with more details of the feast. This would be a magnificent meal. The king spared no expense in providing the richest, most lavish amenities for his guests. Only in their wildest dreams could these people have begun to imagine how grand an event this would be.

But again they refused. One said, “I have a business deal I have to close.” Another, “My crops are ready. I have to bring them in.” Still others decided to kill the servants. It was as if they were sending the king this message. We don’t want to have anything to do with you. We don’t want to have anything to do with your feast, your invitation, your free gift, any of it. The king got the message loud and clear.

Notice what he does next. Not only had he sent his invitation once, but graciously he sent it a second time. Now he is ready to judge those ingrates. If you say “no” to me that many times, if you shut out my grace and goodness, your guilt remains on you. The text says he destroyed those murderers and burned their city. But what an amazing king this is. See what he does next. He sends his servants out again with the same invitation to the same banquet, but this time to people who have never heard of the king’s goodness before. He sent his servants to the crossroads of his kingdom—the place where the most people would be. He gave his servants one directive. Literally it says in the text, whenever you come upon somebody, invite them. It doesn’t matter who they are or what they look like, whenever you see someone, invite them. The servants did their duty. They filled the wedding hall with many different kinds of guests.

Who is this king? This is God. God first sent his servants, the prophets, priests and kings, first to his Old Testament people, the Jews. But they rejected him. So he sent more servants, John the Baptist, the Apostles, his very own Son, to call his people. But again they refused. Stephen said in the Book of Acts in Chapter 7, calling the Jewish people stiff-necked people. He asked them, “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute and kill?” Finally, God spoke to these people. “If you say ‘no’ to me that many times, if you shut out my grace and goodness, your guilt remains on you.” You can see in history what has happened to the Jewish people and any who reject God.

C. S. Lewis, the great Christian writer, probably put it best when he said, “There are only two kinds of people in this world—those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’, and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done.’” In other words, there are those who look

to God for everything, and there are those who look to God for nothing. The person who rejects God will come face to face with God's judgment. It is that plain and it is that simple.

But this is also the God of grace—the God who gives grace to the down trodden and peace to the troubled. God sent his messengers out again—to you and to me. Through pastors and teachers you heard the Word of God. He called you into his family. As members of his family, he gives you a lavish feast to eat. And just as he sent his servants out, so he sends us out as well. And he gives us that same directive—whenever you see someone, invite them to come. It doesn't matter who they are or what they look like or what kind of person they may have been before they come to the feast—whenever you see someone, invite them. The wedding hall isn't yet full. Hurry and bring them.

This king is God—the God who will destroy any who reject him. But this is also the God of grace who wants to eat the feast with everyone. He sends us the invitation. The king who had been so gracious in sending his invitation does something even more amazing now. Not only does he feed us with a wonderful fulfilling meal, but he clothes us for the event.

*Jesus continued on, "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are invited, but few are chosen."*

The king entered the wedding banquet to take a look at all the many guests who had filled his tables. One man in particular caught the king's eye—the one man not wearing wedding clothes. What are these wedding clothes you probably ask? It was a custom in Jesus' day that the host at a royal wedding would provide his guests with a set of royal robes to wear so that the guests would fit in at the palace. They were free of charge. No contracts, no hidden fees, no fine print—it was a free gift. This one man refused the king's gift and decided to come into the feast wearing what he already had on. Naturally the king wanted to know why the man was so foolish. The king had displayed a generous amount of grace in giving this man a free gift—in giving all his guests a free gift. This one man made a decision all on his own to refuse those clothes.

So the king asked him, "How did you get in here, friend?" That question left the man speechless. He had no excuse. It's not that he wasn't rich enough to afford the clothes—they were free. It's not that he didn't get to the feast early enough to pick them up—everyone else was dressed appropriately. This man made a decision all on his own to refuse the king. So the servants of the king threw the man out. This man would be separated from the king's goodness forever. He would have to listen to the wedding celebration from the outside. As he sat outside, he would have a very long time to think, "I had every opportunity to be in there. It is my own fault that I am not."

When the king sees us, will we look out of place because we aren't wearing the proper clothing? Will we be dressed in the robes of Christ's perfect life or in our own filthy rags? If we do look out of place, there is no one to blame but ourselves.

We are all members of God's family. Through baptism, God made you a member of the Holy Christian Church. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians, "You who have been baptized with Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." When you were baptized at the font, the Holy Spirit clothed you with the perfect life of Christ. As a member of God's family, he gives you the pleasure of enjoying peace, forgiveness and joy, all free of charge—all because he is good. But sometimes those free gifts just don't cut it for us. The sinful self that lives inside each and every one of us can cover over how good God really is. We think that our own efforts are good enough. We don't need God and his clothing. God should be pleased with the work that I do at home or at school or at my job. Or perhaps we minimize our sin and refuse to repent of it because it's not that big of a deal. Compared to that other guy over there, I'm practically a saint.

How often don't we just want to throw off the robes that Christ gives us and blend in with the rest of the world? It would be so much easier while I'm away at college if I went to those parties and acted like everybody else. It would be so much easier while I'm at work if I acted and talked like one of the guys while I'm on the factory floor. It would be so much easier to just let loose and have a little fun every now and then. You have to live a little, right? If you work hard, you get to play hard. God will understand.

Dear friends, our God has clothed us in a tuxedo, and we would show up wearing our grubby work jeans? We can show up wearing whatever we want, but show up without the robes of Christ—his perfect life on our body—and we will be thrown into the darkness. Show up wearing our own imagined good works, and we will be thrown outside. While we are outside, we will be separated from God's goodness forever. We will have an eternity in hell to think, "I had every opportunity to be in there. It's my own fault that I'm not."

My dear friends, as our Savior came closer and closer to his suffering and death on Calvary, he had you in mind. He placed this warning at the end of a marvelous parable of grace to remind us that if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall. Our Savior wants each and every one of us with him in heaven. He has sent us an invitation. He has called us into his family. As members of his family, he gives us a lavish feast to eat. From birth and baptism until death, he preserves us in the true Christian faith when we hear the gospel proclaimed in Word and song. He strengthens our faith when we come to his altar and receive his true body and blood. He strengthens us at home in daily devotions where we are reminded that we are his forever. He strengthens us through the encouragement that we receive and give each other as fellow believers.

Dear Christian friends, this is all yours. We would be foolish to refuse equipment when going scuba diving. We would be even more foolish to refuse the perfect life of Christ that he has given us. Don't be careless with Christ's perfection. Confess your sins daily. God is faithful and he will forgive all your sins. Grab on to those good gifts that he gives you to preserve you in your faith. He gives you the perfect life of his Son to

cover over your sin and weakness. Dear friends, come to the king's wedding banquet. He has sent us an invitation and he has clothed us for the event—in Jesus' name. Amen.