

8.07.22 – Pentecost 9

“Who to Invite to Our Table?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Matthew 22:1-14 (NLT) ~ Pam

¹ Jesus also told them other parables. He said, ² “The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. ³ When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!

⁴ “So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!’ ⁵ But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. ⁶ Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.

⁷ “The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. ⁸ And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren’t worthy of the honor. ⁹ Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ ¹⁰ So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ¹² ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. ¹³ Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴ “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

L: These are the Words of God through Jesus. C: Thanks be to God!

Luke 14:7-14 (GNT) ~ Pam

⁷ Jesus noticed how some of the guests were choosing the best places, so he told this parable to all of them: ⁸ “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place. It could happen that someone more important than you has been invited, ⁹ and your host, who invited both of you, would have to come and say to you, ‘Let him have this place.’ Then you would be embarrassed and have to sit in the lowest place. ¹⁰ Instead, when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that your host will come to you and say, ‘Come on up, my friend, to a better place.’ This will bring you honor in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹ For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great.”

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors—for they will invite you back, and in this way you will be paid for what you did. ¹³ When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they are not able to pay you back. God will repay you on the day the good people rise from death.”

Leader: These are Important Words of Jesus. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Loving God, we bless you for our time together this morning. Studying these familiar parables of Jesus has provoked our imaginations and brought us closer to you in the material. Humble us Lord so that we may be hospitable to others as you are to us. Let us hear your message of invitation and help us to be attentive today and every day, listening for your direction as the Holy Spirit leads us personally and as a church. Now speak through this messenger and give us ears to hear you. Amen.

 We are glad to have David and Melissa back safely after their travel adventures! We missed you and hope your luggage finds its way back home soon. And thank you for all the birthday greetings! It was a lovely week! Today's passages are not birthday parties, although the meaning applies to all hospitable gatherings, even our communion table today! The context for both is a wedding or marriage feast. The social protocols of the day required that the right people be invited, defined by their status, wealth and importance, and that they be seated accordingly. Both parables are Jesus' way of speaking about what is to come. He was well known by now and knew that he would soon be going to the cross.

Like the recent parables of the mustard seed and leaven or yeast we discussed and studied, these are "Kingdom of God" parables too: "2 The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. 3 When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!" Jesus is critiquing his elitist opponents, the Jewish religious leaders. There are multiple meanings in this one parable, so we'll dissect it a bit, but time will not allow a thorough study, so please read more about it online or in your home study bibles or commentaries.

The Matthew wedding takes place in a royal city by a royal family, so automatically, we know the guests will be important, political, and

superior. The king's son was getting married, so the king sent out double invitations. Now that was fairly common in that day, perhaps like "save the date" cards we send out before the formal wedding invitation arrives. These days, the invitations are often through email! Double invitations give guests time to check calendars, hear who will be attending (whether it's advantageous or not to go), and who will be their +1. If the so-called right people were too busy, then all would stay away with trivial excuses to snub the host. Or perhaps some of the guests didn't approve of the dinner arrangements. It is hard for us to understand how the servants the king sent out to re-invite the important guests were so disrespected, harmed and murdered! But the guests sent this horrific, physical message to insult the king as host.

His reaction was extreme yet noteworthy. In his anger and yet clarity, he sent servants out to invite anyone off the street who wanted to come eat this delicious feast already prepared; these were the poor, hungry, diseased, and not important to his kingdom (the "good and bad"). First of all, this action was unheard of, so the people hearing the story were really listening and a bit shocked. Know that table fellowship across lines of social and economic status was rare. Anyone seen breaking those cultural norms was ostracized and cut off from family and colleagues, so penalties were real. It was customary though that the host could provide wedding garments for guests if they could not afford them; and so, the king had done this. Do you remember in the past where restaurants required you to dress up? If you men were on vacation, say, and forgot to bring a jacket or tie to a posh restaurant or resort, the restaurant host would discreetly give you one to wear for dinner. We know the dining

scene has become more casual in recent years, but sometimes jackets are still required to dine, rarely but sometimes. The new dress code terms are Casual Elegance, Business Formal, California Casual, or Creative Black Tie. In verses 11-13, the king was not happy with one guest, though provided with it, failed to wear the provided and appropriate clothing. The host was insulted again, so he kicked him out of the party in shame.

There are several ways to interpret this parable. Who is the King -- God; the wedding feast for the king's son represents the messianic banquet referenced in Revelation 19:7-9: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." The servants represent missionaries or prophets sent to invite the guests, yet they receive abuse. Let's break it down: 1.) the invitation is rejected: the first group represent the Jewish people invited by the Gospel to come to Jesus but chose not to. 2.) the invitation is then extended to strangers: God is disappointed so invites the Gentiles into Christ's presence. 3.) the invited are expected to follow the king's wishes: trust and obedience are appropriate responses to God's call. Although the host was insulted by the guest who came in soiled garments (sin), God's forgiveness through Christ clothes the redeemed and redeems the soiled. Remember this story is about judgment; be careful not to interpret the story to serve ourselves or to judge outsiders.

Our faith is a risk, and we often forget that in the comfortable confines of our church sanctuaries. We remember it when we are in the inner city or in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Just because we believe in Jesus Christ does not mean we will not be judged. Scholars say this story is for the age to come, but I think it also calls us to wake up today! The local church is not just for the people we like, or wear the same clothes

we do, or can afford to go out to eat afterward. Church is for the hurting, the angry, the poor as well. The only garments we require are humility and a welcoming spirit. God requires righteousness and behavior acceptable to Jesus' teachings, but let's face it: most of us did not start out that way. Many are called (and we are called to introduce them to Jesus!), but few are chosen (many will reject God). This passage is not to scare us into submission or evangelism, but to encourage us to share our faith, through our actions and our hospitality. The word hospitality means "love of a stranger". Did you know that?

Once we share that love, we must not jockey for the best seat, as illustrated in the Luke passage. Take the lowest seat at the table. Our host, God, will decide who sits where; the proud will be humbled, and the humble will be honored in the Kingdom. Jesus reminds his listeners to invite all to his table: the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. Do we do that, or do we only invite those of status and importance, or those who are already friends? That's our hard lesson for today. Communion may not always occur here at this table, but elsewhere. When we meet someone new or a stranger in need, are we inviting them into the presence of Christ? Or is the invitation merely transactional: let me pay for your meal; let me give you some change. What if we assumed every invitation to someone else – both friend and stranger – is **transformational**? What if we began to realize that God is doing the transforming, and we are just opening a door into his presence? Yes, we need to invite people to church too, but so much is done in the neighborhood, the grocery store, or restaurants – wherever you go! Let us not forget that! Let us approach today's table fellowship in the Lord's Supper with humble and

compassionate hearts, and in any silence, think of someone you may invite the next time. God redeems the soiled through his Son, and God clothes the redeemed with new cloth, new life! Let us invite all to the table for fellowship and salvation! Amen? Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this reminder that you are the King directing our faith and our daily lives. Help us to be invitational and open to others in service and love. Help us to be both courageous and humble as we help to expand your Kingdom. May we share our stories and the gospel with others with our actions and words, so that they may know you. **Amen.**