

*Sermon for the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 9.x.2005, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Chanceford Twp., York Co., Pennsylvania
Holy Communion Liturgy, WOV Setting 5
Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace, from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

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

– Matthew 22:14



Our Lord’s parable of the wedding feast has two parts, and at least two layers of meaning. First of all, the community of Saint Matthew would have heard in the saying that strangers were to be gathered into the king’s wedding banquet confirmation of rumors they had heard or actual evidence they had seen of non-Jews being baptized into fellowship with Christ and the Church. Paul the Apostle was one of those who was walking the highways

and byways of the Roman world, proclaiming God's love in the crucified and risen Christ and inviting *all* to enter into the joy and hope of His fellowship. Perhaps, those Jewish Matthean Christians must have thought to themselves, this is what the LORD had had in mind all along, just as Isaiah had prophesied so long ago, about *all* the nations of the earth turning to the living God and living together, in one community, in peace.

At a deeper level, those Matthean Christians who could trace their lineage back to Moses and Abraham could hear a warning in this parable, especially in the second part. If they, born into God's First Covenant with Israel and now reborn into God's new and final covenant with the whole world through Jesus, if *they*, of all people, did not assemble with the community of faith gladly, with joy and thanksgiving, wearing the beautiful 'wedding garment' of a living faith, then they, *too*, might be cast out into 'the outer darkness' where God is not,

where the community, the fellowship, the love and support of the people of God is not to be found.

This parable is so clear in its implication that I feel as though I am beating a dead horse if I insist on pointing out its application, but I will, all the same. Our God is *such* a good, kind and generous Heavenly Father, a king Whose joy is to make of us kings and queens of His creation and of His redemption of that creation in our own flesh, Son of the daughter of our own humanity. Our God chooses to reign over us by calling us to reign with Him in holiness and in joy. *All we have to do is to answer His invitation! All we have to do is to show up prepared to participate in His glory.* Think of that at our next Holy Communion liturgy when I exhort you in the name of Christ and His whole Church to *'Lift up your hearts!'*

But, what *do* we do? A world full of half-empty churches bears witness against humanity's disinterest in God's invitation, as does humankind's endless varieties of abuse of the creation

and of one another. We simply have too much else to do, too little time to spend five, or ten or even fifteen minutes in conscious practice of the presence of God through prayer. How would it change our worship, and what a welcome, an invitation to those really seeking God in their lives would it send, were *we* to deliberately, faithfully, carefully and lovingly spend time on the night before each Lord's Day and on rising at the dawn of the new Sunday simply throwing the doors of our minds and hearts open to God, allowing the Holy Spirit to dress our souls in the wedding garment of the Lamb's Wedding Feast? What if we really were to lift up our sin-besmirched and broken hearts to the Lord in silent prayer long before the liturgist exhorts us to do that publicly?

But we fear that silence, I think. I know that I do. And so we fill the silence that could have prepared us for worship with chatter, with business, with nothing in particular. If some wonder why they feel no closer to God after gathering for the

Divine Service of Word and Sacrament than they did before, they should ask themselves how they were spiritually dressed in the presence of Christ. It is indeed embarrassing to find oneself dressed inappropriately for any special occasion. There *is* no more special occasion than this hour, in which the Holy Spirit gathers us together to be the Body of Christ in community.

Though we may try to make our outward apparel reflect the inner importance of this time, the living God looks directly through appearance to see what we are really wearing in His presence. When it is the same tawdry rags in which our hearts and minds have slouched around in all week, wrinkled with carelessness and filthy with sins unworthy of the image of God in us, no wonder we feel out of place, for we truly are.

Hear God's invitation to you today, *this* Lord's Day: All you are required to do is to come to the wedding feast of the King's only Son, and to wear a garment of joy and hope, the two pillars of any wedding and the celebration of any marriage. But this

wedding feast is the celebration of God's own decision to share life fully with you, His people. The bright garment of hope and the joy we are asked to wear is not the guarded optimism with which we encourage the bridal pairs who invite us to their weddings. It is the garment of faith in a future that belongs to God in Jesus Christ alone. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G.!