

Twentieth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "Yes! To the Party"
Matthew 22:1-14
October 10-11, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Royal weddings: such glamor! Such interest! When Prince William and Kate Middleton were married on April 29, 2011, some of our church friends set their alarms to watch it live in what was the middle of the night here. At least one of our church friends actually hosted a party for the true Anglophiles and royal watchers among us ☺. Because of today's Gospel I thought of the people who received invitations to Kate & William's wedding, most of whom surely and enthusiastically RSVP'd YES. 1,900 guests attended the wedding at Westminster Abbey. 600 guests were invited to the wedding luncheon the Queen hosted, and a mere 300 different guests participated in an "intimate" wedding dinner hosted by Charles, the Prince of Wales. I'm thinking a lot of notes were compared by people who made the cut for ceremony, or lunch, or dinner and those who didn't. Can you imagine receiving and then **declining any** of those invitations?

In this weekend's parable of the wedding banquet the bride and groom are never even mentioned. All eyes are on the king whose son is being married. We don't know whom he invited for starters. We don't know why the would-be guests so casually refused the invitation (little knowing they'd be in for it!). The king sends out the messengers **again** to tell the no-shows:

'Look, everything is on the table, the prime rib is ready for carving. Come to the feast!'

⁵⁻⁷ "They only shrugged their shoulders and went off, one to weed his garden, another to work in his shop. The rest, with nothing better to do, beat up on the

messengers and then killed them. The king was outraged and sent his soldiers to destroy those thugs and level their city. (Matt. 22.4-7, The Message)

Let's just say, even more puzzling to us than the guests' refusal to come is the murder of the king's messengers by the unappreciative, dismissive invitees **and** the king's own over-the-top violent and equally murderous reaction to the murders. That story line only makes **some** sense if we see the king's servants as symbolic of the prophets and the guests' mistreatment of them as the people of Israel's refusal to welcome God's message and insistence on killing the messengers God sends (a group that will ultimately include Jesus).

We can be so turned off by the bloody violence that we lose sight of God's patient, divine persistence in attempting to communicate with God's people. We can be so scandalized we forget about the loving mercy, the *hesed*, so evident in God's desire to be in intimate relationship with God's forever straying, frequently idolatrous people. This is a God passionately in love with a people who seem incapable of loving in return.

Finally the remaining surviving slaves:

... went out on the streets and rounded up everyone they laid eyes on, good and bad, regardless. And so the banquet was on—every place filled.

11-13 "When the king entered and looked over the scene, he spotted a man who wasn't properly dressed. He said to him, 'Friend, how dare you come in here looking like that!' The man was speechless. Then the king told his servants, 'Get him out of here—fast. Tie him up and ship him to hell. And make sure he doesn't get back in.' (Matt. 10-13, *The Message*)

If we were starting to feel okay about this story, we now feel bad about it all over again.

From our perspective, this is so arbitrary, unfair! I initially thought, this poor unsuspecting

guy is vacuumed up off the street and deposited at a wedding reception, so who can **expect** him to be properly dressed for the occasion?? And then I learned more.... (which is the benefit of leading and attending a Bible study!)

The fellow in question is addressed as "*friend*," but as one commentator has said, "*buster*" better conveys the tone of the confrontation -- because in that culture, wedding garments would be **provided** to the guests as they arrived. So we've got another **refusal** on our hands. For some unstated reason, this guy refuses to wear the wedding garment he's offered. We can only imagine he's making a statement like, "I'll be present in body, but not in spirit." We can guess he will not toast the bride and groom, he will not dance, he will not thank the king on the way out the door. He's been invited to a party, but by gum, he **will not** celebrate. 'May make us think of Auntie Mame observing, "Life is a banquet, but most poor suckers are starving to death."

Robert Farrar Capon was an Episcopal priest/author who wrote about this parable and had something very interesting to say:

"Nobody is kicked out who wasn't already in... [H]ell remains radically unnecessary."¹
 The guy who refused the wedding banquet was **in the door**. He gets himself thrown out.
 Moving beyond the parable to people's thoughts and concerns about heaven and hell, Capon writes:

[H]ell, ultimately, is not the place of punishment for sinners; sinners are not punished at all; they go straight to heaven just for saying yes to grace. [For saying Yes! to the invitation, undeserved though it be, and showing up ready to celebrate!] Hell is simply the nowhere that is the only thing left for those who will not accept their acceptance by grace... The sad truth of our fallen condition is that we don't want anything to do with a system of salvation that works by grace through faith. We want our merits, sleazy though they may be, rewarded – and we want everybody else's obviously raunchy behavior punished.²

There's a sense in this parable that especially the guy who refuses to dress for the party, but maybe including some of those who refused to attend from the get-go, these folks think the occasion is beneath them and feel that they don't want to keep company with the riff-raff who have evidently been invited. ("If the guest list isn't more selective than **that**, I don't choose to attend.") In other words, "I am **superior** to these others and will not lower myself to party with them. I have more important things to do than hang out with these losers." I think St. Paul would say, "Friend (Buster), you **are** one of those losers," because "*we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23) You **are** one of those "losers" whom God loves "**so much**" that God gave the only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17) God doesn't evict us from the circle of light into darkness. We evict ourselves because we'd rather be left alone to feel superior, rather than admit our own sinfulness. We're rather cling to the illusion of our goodness than enjoy God's forgiveness **and** the company of those who are similarly forgiven.

So when we hear Jesus' concluding words to this difficult parable, "*For many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matt. 20:14, NRSV), "*Many get invited; only a few make it*" (*The Message*), let's not think it's the ones with the most spiritual brownie points or the most good works who make the cut: it's those with the humility to say, as John Newton of *Amazing Grace* fame, did shortly before his death: "I am a great sinner, but I have an even greater Savior." **That** is cause to celebrate, in this life **and** in the next, when we will be invited guests to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let's say Yes! both now and later, and wear our party clothes. Amen

¹Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), p. 125.

²Ibid, p. 127.

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