

9 October 2005
Pentecost 21

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Come to the Feast!”
Text: Matthew 22:1-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A lot of people spend a lot of time trying to figure out the will of God for their lives. And that usually has to do with things like: what job does God want me to have, where should I live, who should I marry, how should I run my business, and things like that. We want to live and do things as God wants us to. *And that's not bad.* But the truth is that God has given us a great deal of freedom in those matters, and He can use our decisions – even if they're not the best decisions – to work good in our lives and in the lives of others.

But there is something that God wills and wants and desires very much for you, and with the parable that we heard today, Jesus reveals *that* will of His Father for us: that what He wants *most of all* is to have you at His party; at the magnificent wedding feast that He has prepared for His Son. He wants His hall to be filled! And so He invites and invites and invites. The good and bad, the high and low, the rich and poor, no one left out. His Son who, as we heard last week, was thrown out of the vineyard and killed, is now alive again, resurrected from the dead, and is to be wed. *And your Father wants you there.* At His party, to celebrate! And so the call goes out: Come! Come to the feast! All people, from the beginning of time to the end of time, come! All is ready. Come to the wedding feast.

But not all come. For some, because there is just no time. There is work to do. Places to go, people to see, things to do. Children, schoolwork, activities, responsibilities. An already over-filled schedule. And these things make us so tired. No time to party, no time to celebrate . . . no time to spend with your Heavenly Father? Maybe it goes even farther than that. Even to His Word, and prayer, and His gifts – no time. Thank you for the invitation. Maybe later. Yes, later. But does later ever come?

But still the King pleads: Come, please. All is ready. Ready for you.

Perhaps we just don't know what we're missing. Isaiah told us though. It is the best of

the best! A *royal* invitation to a *royal* feast! Come, all is ready! . . . But not all come. Perhaps because we just don't believe it. A kingly invitation from God would look better than this, wouldn't it? Grander, more exciting. How can water, how can bread and wine, how can words on a page, and words spoken from a sinful mouth, be – do – such great things? If the King Himself came, well then, *okay!* But until then, don't bother me too much. Live and let live. Don't pester me to come to church, don't bug me about sin or how I'm living, about my lifestyle choices, about my freedom. Don't interfere, because otherwise you might go too far, you know! You're not the King, you know. And you know what happens to servants who meddle and pester too much?

Yes, we heard what happens. It is happening, all over the world today. Those who rebel so will be dealt with in justice. But notice – the Father's will does not change. The wedding feast goes on! And so still He pleads: Come, please. All is ready. Come, everyone!

And look who comes! It is not just those who might be considered “desirable;” but also the undesirables. The working poor, the walking wounded, those with issues; the bag ladies, the prostitutes, the derelicts, the homeless, the street people . . . you and me? And the King is delighted! The King doesn't care who you are or what you have done. This wedding is too important, and the hall must be filled! And have you nothing to wear? No problem! Your gown of good works or tuxedo of treasure or primping of pride are all like a filthy rag to Him anyway. No, He will dress you. In His clothes. And so He opens the royal wardrobe and tells His servants to carry down all His best finery. And everyone who comes gets a robe. A kingly robe. A wedding garment. The best of the best. What we could never buy or earn. It is the robe of the King's family. His robe of righteousness. The robes washed white – perfectly, spotlessly white – in the blood of the Lamb.

And so the hall is filled – with sinners *who now look like* kings and princes and princesses. Not because they are, but because their King, in His joy and grace, has made them so. They didn't have to clean themselves up or make themselves right first. They just came. The King would do the rest. Gladly! And He did, and the hall is filled! . . .

Except, sadly, for one. One man who refused the royal robe, and thought his own clothes (his own righteousness) good enough for this feast. For, after all, *he* wasn't so bad – especially compared to the rest of these . . . these “*guests!*” His clothes weren't as dirty, or shabby as *theirs*. He had a good job and was a respectable member of the community. He gave to good charities, didn't run around on his wife, never hurt anybody. Surely, the King would know that! Surely, he would understand. Surely, he *deserved* this invitation to the King's party! The others? Yeah, right! For them it was grace. For them it was

forgiveness. But not for him!

But when confronted by the King, He had no answer. His self-righteous thoughts dissolved in the presence of the King. *He was speechless*. If He had confessed his sin, his pride, his assumption, and confessed His King's grace, surely there would have been forgiveness for him too! Another robe brought out. Smiles and hugs and rejoicing. But his silence showed no such faith. His rebellion just as bad as those who would not come at all, and so his fate was also the same. For at this party, all is given by grace, all is received by faith, and all is from the King.

And this is the will of God for you! Oh, all the rest, the things in your life, He cares about, yes. But most of all, He wants you to come to His party, His wedding feast, by grace through faith. That you receive of His goodness – not because you deserve it, but because He wants to give it. That you receive His robe of righteousness and forgiveness, which forgives who we *are*, and makes us what He wants us *to be*. That we come not in self-righteousness and self-justification, not comparing ourselves with *others*; but in repentance, receiving His salvation, His grace. That we not be too busy, or too proud, or too stubborn, or too filled with concerns for the things of this world – but come and receive.

Sadly, some will not come; will not see this invitation as good. Some prefer instead to believe in a demanding, not a giving, god. A god who judges our lives, our everyday decisions, our choices, and holds us under the gun. Always watching, always threatening. A god we are fed to, rather than One we are fed by!

But if you want to know what God is like, *really like*, look no farther than the cross. For the cross is where the King, the Father, judged our sin. The cross is where the Father held not us, but His Son, under the gun. The cross is where the Father fed His Son to sin, death, and devil, *that from these powers that held us captive we might be set free*. And we are. You are. Free! No longer captive to the sin you are, but free to be the saint God has made you. No longer captive to the things of this world, but free to look forward to the life of the world to come. No longer captive to the struggle of having to justify yourself and why God should accept you, but free to simply rejoice in the fact that He does. By grace. His Son's robe of righteousness, resurrection and life, given to you in your Baptism. All His doing! Nothing you could do to deserve it, no matter if you were hours old or a century old! His royal robe covering you, forgiving your sins, and making you good and right in His sight.

Oh, now, we dirty our robe, yes we do! Just like the kid who stomps through the mud puddle with his good, new school clothes on! We stomp through the cesspools of sins

with our royal robes on. Because that is how things will be for now, because we get impatient; we are not yet there, at the feast. The invitations to the feast are still going out. There is still room. There is still time. . . .

But in fact, so eager is our God and King to have us at His party that even *now* He sets His Table before us here and bids us come! And so we come, with our dirtied robes – but not speechless, but in confession. **Confessing in repentance** who we are and what we have done, but also **confessing in faith** who He is and what He has done. And His forgiveness washes us clean again. There is no doubt. For it is all by grace.

And so now, dressed in His robe of Christ's righteousness and washed with His forgiveness, He bids us come and eat – a foretaste of the feast to come. And so we come, for His Son, the Lamb, has been slain and is here for us. His body and blood, nourishing us, feeding us, strengthening us; a kind of wedding rehearsal with the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven . . . until the Son comes again, with the final call, to take home His Bride, *when* the real celebration will begin!

And you know, that's when we will receive the last and fullest surprise of grace. For when you arrive at the Heavenly wedding hall, you find out that you are not merely a guest, or even an honored guest at this wedding – *but that you are the Bride*. The one for whom Christ did it all! The one whom He loves so much, and unites to Himself, forever.

So come. Come to the feast. *Your* wedding feast. All is ready *for you*.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.