Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

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Matthew 22:1-14

The Danger of Having It Your Way

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. . . . [the king directed his servants to go to] “the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.” . . . So the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:1-3, 9-14 ESV)

Dearly Beloved of Christ Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

We have a problem, and it afflicts us all - young and old, male and female, parent and child. It’s a problem we can often see in others, but are unable to see in ourselves. And that problem is selfishness, and in particular a selfishness that thinks, “I know best,” and that demands things “my” way. This selfishness separates us from God and from each other. It causes thinking that leaves God out of the picture, or at least minimizes Him and His Word. After all, He says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is. 55:8-9). Therefore, let’s hear what Jesus has to say about the danger of “having things your way.”

God Himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords, invited the Israelites to the wedding feast of His Son. Purely out His grace, He had called them to be His children, His guests, at the banquet He would provide. But when He sent His servants the prophets to call the people to the banquet, when He sent His servants to call the people to repent and return to the Lord their God, they refused. They wanted God's blessings their way, on their terms, not His. They willfully shunned God's call to repentance. They refused to give up their selfish idolatry. They thought they knew best where and how to worship. They thought they knew best how to deal with other nations. They were too caught up in the cares and concerns of this world, especially the pursuit of the stuff of this world, to accept God's invitation. Some thought it better to snub the King of kings to satisfy their greed than to receive His gracious invitation to repentance and life. Others had it their way as they abused and even killed the prophets.

Of course, this selfish refusal to hear and receive God's gracious invitation wasn't limited to the Old Testament. It continued right into the New Testament. When Christ, Himself *the* Servant of God, called the Jews and their leaders to repentance and faith in Him, when He invited them to the heavenly feast of eternal life with the Son, He was mocked, spit upon, beaten, and finally nailed to a cross to die. He suffered the worst of abuse simply because He invited people to believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But they would not accept that invitation. If they wanted heaven at all, it would only be on their terms.

And after His ascension, we see the apostles and evangelists abused and killed when *they* invited the Jews to repentance and faith in Christ. The book of Acts is replete with stories of the abuse suffered by Peter and John, and, of course, Paul. The Jews as a whole, and especially their leaders, simply didn't want to hear the gracious invitation to repentance, faith, and life extended to them by God. Though they had been invited to participate in the heavenly feast, they wanted no part of it, or at least they didn't want it on God's terms. They showed by their actions that they didn't want anything to do with God, the true King.

So God did destroy "those murderers and burned their city." In 70 A.D., the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, set it on fire and executed thousands of Jews. Thus the Jews were excluded from the wedding feast because of their own stubborn refusal to accept the gracious invitation of the King of glory. They rejected the free gift of forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, and in so doing earned for themselves the wrath of Almighty God.

Now this is certainly a warning for us as well. For God has graciously invited us to the wedding feast for His Son. Though we are sinners, one and all, though we in no way deserve it, we are invited to the feast of forgiveness, the marriage feast of the Lamb in His eternal kingdom. We are given the highest of honors by being invited to the King's own feast. Yet, in our selfishness, we too are often indifferent to the King's invitation. There are times when we simply don't care what the King says. There are times when we spurn His gracious invitation to attend to other matters we think are more important. And there may even be times when we have so despised the King that we mistreated His servants whom He has sent to invite us to the banquet.

Still, in His love and mercy, God continues to call us to the wedding feast. No matter how often we have refused His invitation, no matter how long we've followed our own way, He continues to call us to repentance. He continues to call us to turn from our sins to Him. He continues to call us from trusting in ourselves, our works, our selfish desires, our thoughts and ways, to Him and His thoughts and ways. He continues to call us to believe in the Son whom He sent to bear our sins and be our Savior. He continues to invite us to His feast in which He gives us all that we need for life with Him.

He even gives us the wedding garment we need as a free and gracious gift. For the wedding garment is the robe of righteousness, Christ's righteousness. In fact, it is Christ Himself. This robe was placed upon us in Holy Baptism as our sins were washed away and as we put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). The old is gone and the new is come (2 Cor. 5:17). Our old filthy, stinking, sinful self is covered by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. His death on the cross was the punishment for our sins so that we might enter and remain in the wedding hall. What a gracious invitation!

However, there's a great danger in rejecting this garment and wanting things our way. For in Jesus' parable, when the King entered the hall, he saw a guest not wearing a wedding garment. He addresses the guest, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" Then we're told the man was speechless. There was no answer, no excuse. For the man had refused the wedding garment that had been offered to him. Instead, he preferred to wear his own righteousness. He thought he could come to the banquet on his terms wearing whatever clothes he wanted. He wanted God, and others, to see what *he* had done. He didn't realize that "all our works are as filthy rags" (Is. 64:6). He didn't believe that "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23). The result is that he is bound "hand and foot and cast

into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." For his refusal to wear the robe of righteousness, for his refusal to "put on Christ" through faith, he forfeited his place at the banquet. He is forever bound in his sin, separated from the light of Christ.

This is the great danger we face when we want things our way. This is the danger we face if we reject God and all His works and all His ways to follow our own thoughts and way. If we want to trust in ourselves, in our works, in our ways, we too will be cast out of the presence of God forever.

Still, we are here today, not because we are worthy, not because we somehow deserve to be here, but only because God, in His mercy, has invited us to be here. And those of us who have received that invitation were empowered by that invitation to come. For being here in God's house is but a glimpse of what awaits us in heaven. For when we gather in God's presence to receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, we feast at His banquet table. Yet, this is but a shadow of the glorious banquet which is prepared for us in heaven. And what we do here is but a rehearsal for that great and glorious day. How good it is to be invited to the wedding feast of the King's Son!

Yes, God has prepared a feast fit for a King and has graciously invited us to that feast. He has done all that is needed, even giving us the proper clothes so that we may dine in His presence forever. God grant that we heed His warning about wanting things our way so that we do not reject His invitation or the wedding garment He gives us. But rather that we joyously receive from Him not only His invitation, but also the garment of salvation that we would live in His presence and enjoy His heavenly feast. To the glory of His holy name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener