

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Trinity 20 – October 13, 2024**  
**Matthew 22:1-14 – Wedding Garments**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

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

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

That's what Jesus said. Strive to enter the wedding feast of the kingdom of heaven. Do whatever it takes to get in.

Because no earthly wedding comes close to this glorious wedding. This is the marriage feast of the Lamb, the celebration which has no end. Even the party favors of this wedding are beyond belief. For Jesus will give to every guest no mere soap bubbles or coasters or pens – the wedding favors of his marriage to the Church are forgiveness and eternal life for every guest.

This is why it's so shocking that anyone would despise or ignore the call. How shocking that those who were invited at first did not care and took it for granted! Who in his right mind would go off, one to his farm, another to his business? How insane that they would actually seize his servants, treat them shamefully, and kill them!

Jesus is preaching this parable against the chief priests and Pharisees. He's saying that people like them are truly insane. For here is the Son, the heir, the Bridegroom himself. They've ignored and killed his prophets for centuries. And now, the Son himself is here in person to invite them to his own wedding feast. But in just a few days, they will put him to death. They will even come out to his cross to mock him, and gleefully celebrate as they watch him die.

And it's just as insane that so many in the world today are called by God into church, invited to the foretaste of his wedding feast here in the church week after week in his word and sacrament, but they simply do not care. They make excuses. They have better things to do than come to church.

Because God is truly offering you the good things of heaven already here in this life, here in the church. He's offering you bread and wine without money or price – come buy and eat – do not despise the gifts.

At least the man in the parable who was caught without a wedding garment, at least he wanted to be there. Good for him. Unlike the wicked guests who ignored the first invitation, at least he knew how blessed it is to seek the presence of Jesus the Bridegroom, to come into the presence of his Holy Bride, the church.

And yet, sadly, it did him no good. Seeking God is not enough, if we only seek him on our own terms, apart from Christ and his righteousness. For though this man was striving to enter, though somehow he managed to get in, in the end he was caught and cast outside, into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For it is necessary, in order to stand before the king, to be purified from sin. All of us sinners must be washed in the blood of the Lamb. We must be spotless. Otherwise, apart from the wedding garments of Jesus and his righteousness, every single person remains a sinner, naked and exposed, a mere interloper unworthy of the feast.

But how sad, you might think! How sad that even though the King sent his servants to gather everyone they could find, bad and good, to fill the wedding hall with guests, how sad that just because this one man had no garment, he was cast out. Why didn't they just go find him a garment? Why not let him stay?

It's because he didn't want a wedding garment. He didn't think he needed one.

Think about what the wedding garment represents. The wedding garment is the white robes of Christ's own righteousness, received by faith. And this clothing is the baptismal gown you received when God baptized you, when he stripped off your old polluted garment of sin, and covered you in his white robes. As Paul clearly teaches in Galatians 3, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Putting on Christ through baptism gives you the first party favor of the wedding: the forgiveness of sins. As the apostle Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” And the first party favor comes with the second wedding favor, eternal life. For as Jesus has promised, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” Because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is

also life and salvation.

But the man without a garment was cast out, because he did not have faith. He thought he could enter the wedding apart from believing and being baptized, on his own terms.

He should have heeded the warning of Jesus. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” There is no salvation for those who try to get into the church apart from God’s gift, apart from his grace and mercy, apart from his blessed means of grace.

For those who try to get in apart from baptism, who rely on their good behavior, who reject the gifts and sacraments of God, the king has only one condemnation. “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Many are called, but few are chosen. The call goes out to many, to everyone. All the world is called to hear and repent and believe the gospel. Because Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the whole world, and he calls everyone to repentance.

So heed his call. Honor his invitation. Come eagerly to the wedding banquet. Come in to the church. Receive the good blessings here with thanksgiving. Do not despise the gifts, but make the best use of the time. Strive to get into the wedding feast, to be numbered among the elect, to inherit eternal life.

Come, for everything is now ready. The table is prepared. Come, for the feast is already being offered to you for free, here in the church, in his holy supper. And come by faith, or not at all. Come clothed not in your own righteousness, but only in the blood of Jesus.

But what if – God forbid – what if we are found unworthy? What if our names are not found in the book of life? What if we are not wearing the proper garments? What if we are not among the few who are chosen?

If you are fearful of judgment day, if you’re terrified that your name might not be found in the book of life, that you might not be worthy, then be comforted. Worthiness is a matter of faith. On your own, you certainly are unworthy. But being found in Christ is what makes you worthy, because Jesus is worthy.

This is what the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 55 means. “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” To those who return in repentant faith, our God is a God of compassion. He will abundantly pardon.

And this is also why your king has given you baptism, in order to comfort you in your fears. So that when the fear of judgment and hell comes upon you, you can say, “No! I am baptized. Jesus has clothed me with his righteousness. He’s given me the wedding garments. I am worthy, not on account of anything in me, but only because of what Jesus has done for me.”

Truly, this is why baptism matters and the sacraments matter. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are God’s gifts to you, to comfort you. They’re external signs that prove to you, against all doubt, that you are forgiven, washed and cleansed. They’re the proof that God has called you personally and chosen you and made you ready to stand before his judgment throne.

So have no doubt that through these means of grace, Jesus has brought you into the Church, as members of the bride. And know for certain that your Bridegroom who has brought you here will also take his Bride to himself. Not merely until death do us part. No, forever. So rejoice! For now nothing, not life nor death nor anything in all creation, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.