

**Matthew 22:1-14**

No one is getting married here today, but there is enough food to throw a good-sized party. What if nobody came? I don't mean to this imaginary party; I mean to the sausage dinner today? What if not one person showed up to eat sausage and sauerkraut and sample homemade pies? Would you be disappointed? Shocked? Upset? Obviously you don't take these words seriously because you know that the basement will be packed with people many times over. Everyone will be busy working because many hundreds of people—friends, neighbors, and a few strangers will show up.

But isn't it true that the king in our text believed the exact same thing? He didn't butcher a dozen hogs and prepare kettles of mashed potatoes, but he did plan an elaborate dinner. His son was getting married. Not the 58<sup>th</sup> annual reception for his son, but the very first. The wedding day was at hand and the invitations had been sent out. In those days people were invited twice. Those who had been invited were invited again. The king sent out his servants to invite the invited, but not one person was willing to come. They all had better things to do—take care of chores on the farm, go to work in the family business—most of the invited simply ignored the king's invitation. Some grabbed the king's servants and insulted them. Others flat-out killed them. Apparently they weren't very hungry.

Now obviously it won't happen, but if no one showed up here today, what would hurt the most? The loss of the income? The knowledge that many months of hard work was all for nothing? Or perhaps the sadness of being rejected by people whom you really thought were dear friends and good neighbors? When no one came to his son's wedding feast, the king was angry and he did two things: he showed his wrath, and he showed his compassion. Those who rejected his invitation and mistreated his servants, he destroyed. He sent his troops and burned down their city. And this happened in the year 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. God's chosen people rejected God's wedding feast for His Son. They closed their ears to Jesus. They mistreated Jesus. They crucified Jesus. This parable was a clear warning to them of what God, the King, was going to do in His anger. About forty years after Jesus ascended into heaven, this parabolic prophecy came true. Their city, the city of Jerusalem, was absolutely demolished.

But then the king showed his compassion. He sent out his servants and told them to invite as many as they could find. "My dinner is prepared; my oxen and fattened calves have been slaughtered...go," he said to his servants, "to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast...both bad and good...and the wedding hall was filled with guests."

Now is this parable was simply a warning to the Jews, then it was interesting for us to hear today, but that's as far as it goes. It would have little meaning for our lives. But that's hardly the case. If we choose to ignore these words of our Lord and pass them off as words for others, but not for ourselves, then we are no different from those in the parable who paid no attention to the king's servants.

The question before us today is "Who are we in the parable?" The king is God the Father. The wedding feast is for His Son, Jesus Christ. The king's servants are God's messengers who speak His Word faithfully. That means that we are the guests. You and I did not come here today by our own authority. This is God's House, not ours. We are here not because we have ownership of this place, and of the words we hear, and of the Sacraments we

receive, but because we are invited to come. We are guests; and the reason why we are guests is because those who had been invited before us refused to come.

The people God had chosen; those He had invited by the words of His prophets paid no attention. They refused to believe in Jesus. They would not receive Him as their Savior. They killed Him on a cross. And so the fattened calf has been slaughtered. The meal of God's grace is ready to be eaten. The blood of the Crucified One is poured out for all, but because those who were invited did not come, you and I are invited guests today. God's wrath upon the Jews results in His showing mercy to you and me. His anger in burning down their city allows us to know His compassion and to have a place at His table.

Are all invited? Do all have a place at the King's wedding feast? "Many are called," says Jesus, "But few are chosen." Jesus died for all, even for those who crucified Him; even for those who today reject Him. But few know Him as their Savior. Few come to the wedding feast. Few rejoice to be seated at His table of grace. As with the invited, many today are too busy to receive His invitation. They are busy with chores on the farm. They are busy with making a living. Most today, as with the invited, simply choose to pay no attention when the dinner bells are rung from atop the steeple. They're not against Jesus' church; they just choose to ignore Him. Others treat God's messengers shamefully. As with the invited, they insult those who speak God's words to them. And some, within their hearts, murder them with their hatred.

But today you are a guest here at the King's wedding feast. The wedding feast is heaven's feast, and that feast is spread out for you today—not the one downstairs—the feast right here and now. God's mercy does not come through sausage and sauerkraut. He gives it in bread and wine. God's eternal gifts are not given by the work we do for His church today, but in His words of grace to you right now.

You are a guest no matter how you have lived. The king's servants did not go out and invite those who were good. They invited any they could find, both bad and good. Your past life does not determine your place here as a guest. You may have rejected your Savior in the past, but today He shows mercy to you. He forgives you and gives you a seat at His wedding feast. You may have done great and terrible sins in your past, but today all is forgotten and forgiven. Jesus shed His blood for you. He was slaughtered on a cross so that you today have a place at His table of grace.

Being good or bad does not matter with God. Being good will not cause Him to receive you; being bad will not cause Him to reject you. All He requires is that you be hungry. Those who are not hungry will not eat. They may come and admire our beautiful church building, but they will not eat of the dinner. They may come and fellowship with others, but they will not eat. They may come and work at the dinner, but they will not eat. And so it is with God's wedding feast. To be worthy; to have a place at His heavenly table, you and I must be hungry. Those who do not hunger for God's mercy will refuse His invitation. Those who do not see themselves as wretched sinners will not hunger for Jesus' words of absolution. Why is it that ten times more people will show up downstairs today than will seat themselves up here at Jesus' heavenly feast? "Many are called," Jesus says, "But few are chosen." Christ died for all, but very few hunger for Christ.

Are you hungry? For food for your stomach, probably; but what about the food of life? Do you believe that you are a sinner before God? Do you believe that you have offended Him by the way you have lived? Do you believe that you deserve nothing but His temporal and eternal punishment? Do you desire His mercy? Are you sorry for your sins and seek His forgiveness? Then you are seated in the right place. Here is Christ Jesus for you. God's dinner is prepared. Everything is ready. Jesus suffered, died, and rose again for you. There is nothing you must do to gain entrance into heaven. "It is finished!" said Jesus on the cross, for you.

Right now God's food is being served. He is the Host; you are the guest. Right now through the words coming into your ears He is pouring His blessings out to you. He gives you His forgiveness. He gives you eternal salvation. He gives you a place in heaven...not whether we're bad or good, but because Jesus did all things for you.

Now is the time. Tomorrow may be too late. Those who come to the sausage dinner tonight at midnight will not be fed. The food will all be gone. Today in your ears Jesus is feeding you His words of life. There may be no tomorrow for us. Last night a woman was killed right out here on the highway. She was planning on having a tomorrow, but for her there is none. And so for us, what a wonderful blessing that God's meal is here for you today. He forgives you now. Heaven is yours in Jesus now. After the meal downstairs today you may not be hungry for sausage for a while. May God, however, in mercy always keep you hungering for Christ, for His words of life are for you always. Amen.