

This is a difficult parable. Difficult to preach. Difficult to hear. It is filled with negativity. With rage and violence, with destruction, and with weeping and gnashing of teeth. The preacher must be careful not to use this parable as a hammer and bash his hearers with it, tossing in some Gospel at the end. The hearer must be careful not to think of everyone else who actually needs to hear this parable.

God Himself is the king. And what He has prepared is exquisite. This is a wedding feast beyond compare. No expense has been spared. Every guest who attends will be astonished. This is a feast to end all feasts.

Very likely this is how we think of heaven. We do not fully grasp how incredibly magnificent it will be. But we do somewhat, and so we look forward to it. The same way we look forward to being here on Sundays, right? Because this feast is a foretaste of the feast to come. Or am I wrong?

I think most people would disagree with me on this. Their actions show it, the parable confirming it. Most people would say they look forward to heaven. But they hardly look forward to the feast given here in the house of God week after week.

Yet how does Jesus begin our text? "*The kingdom of heaven,*" He says, "*may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.*" The kingdom of heaven is not that feast which we enter when we die. We enter it now. The feast is taking place now. The invitation does not say, "Come to the wedding feast when you die." But "Come to the feast...it's ready now."

This is both a stern warning and a great comfort. You do not need to worry whether you will be allowed to enter the wedding feast of heaven when you die. You are already partaking of that feast right here and now.

Jesus holds His church together, His saints in heaven and His saints on earth. We embrace Him by faith here even as they are embraced by Him in heaven. Pay attention later as we sing the Sanctus, the "Holy, Holy, Holy." Just before, we hear the pastor say: "*Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying...*" And the hymn is already going full blast because it is already being sung by those in heaven. The saints there sing it continuously, and we who gather around Christ here join in singing it with them. They are singing as they partake of the wedding feast in heaven. We sing with them partaking of the wedding feast here. But it is the same feast. "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism...one church, one wedding feast,*" because there is one Bridegroom and one bride. And you are that bride even as Christ is your Bridegroom.

And so no wonder you are invited to the feast. Is there ever a wedding feast where the bride is not invited? And yet, you come as a guest. You come not by right, but by invitation. And you come wearing the wedding garment of Christ's holiness and innocence. You were dressed in this garment in your baptism. You hear these words after a baptism has taken place, from our hymnal page 271: *The pastor may place a white garment on the newly baptized while saying:* "Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness

that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

That man in the parable who was bound hand and foot and tossed into the outer darkness was not wearing this wedding garment. And he was speechless. There was nothing he could say in response. He was not wearing Christ, and so he had nothing.

But you have everything because you have Christ Jesus. There is not a day in your life when you are not baptized into Christ. He purchased your wedding garment for you by His bloody death on the cross. And no one can take it from you. This is how you enter the wedding feast in heaven. Not covered with your own good works but covered with Jesus.

The devil will tempt you to doubt if you are worthy to enter. “*They were not worthy,*” said the king in the parable of those who refused to come to the feast. The devil will point you to your failures in life, your sins of the past, even your secret sins. “What makes you think you are worthy?” he delights in asking.

Throw Jesus at him. “*Worthy is the Lamb!* And since He shed His blood for me, everything in my past is forgiven.” “He is worthy,” writes Luther, “who believes these words: *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*”

No one can make themselves worthy, but many make themselves unworthy. Simply by refusing the invitation. Some refuse because they always have better things to do than partake of the wedding feast God has prepared for them. Some refuse the invitation because they do not believe God could forgive one so wretched as they.

Let this never be you. The king in the parable told his servants to go out and invite both “*bad and good.*” “*No matter who you find,*” the Greek says here, “*invite them.*” Jesus died for every sinner. And so no one is too bad to receive the invitation. All are invited. You are invited. There is nothing in your past that disqualifies you. Everything is forgiven. You are forgiven. This is what the feast here is all about.

And so you will heed the stern warning in this parable. You will never think you can waltz into the wedding feast of heaven yet ignoring the wedding feast God prepares for you here and now. And even as you heed the warning in the parable, you can be greatly assured and comforted. For the Jesus you partake of here and now is the same Jesus who will usher you into the wedding feast of heaven.

He is the One you always wear in your baptism. He covers you with His holy life. And so you shall stand without fear before Him on that great Day both as His invited guest and as His bride. Amen.