

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

Over the past several weeks we've been hearing Jesus telling parable after parable as he teaches his followers what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

He told a story about an **Unjust Servant** who was forgiven much but could not forgive.

He told a story about a Landowner who kept going out again and again sending people into his **vineyard**—and then gave them all the same reward.

He told a story about two Sons—each of whom was sent to work in the **Vineyard**; one said “No” but went anyway; while the other said “Yes” and didn't go—and which did the will of the Father?

And now today, we have another parable—not about Vineyards this time—but about a KING who gave a WEDDING FEAST.

I. Parable of the Wedding Feast

A. When Jesus told these stories they were usually open-ended like his other parables, but it didn't take long for Matthew and the Early Church to turn these parables into an **allegory**.

1. Remember, an **allegory** is a story that has a symbolic meaning—where something stands for something else.

2. So, with this in mind, the Early Church quickly turned this parable into another story of the Christian Church replacing Judaism as God's people.

3. In this version:

- The King represents God;
- The first invited Guests are the Jewish Leaders;
- The servants are the Prophets,
- and you can imagine who the new guests might be.

4. And because the first Guests—the Jewish Leaders—refuse the invitation of the King—God—their invitation is REVOKED and their place is given to the new Guests—the followers of Jesus.

5. Matthew goes so far as to have the King burn their city—for remember, he is writing after the Romans had sacked Jerusalem and adds that for good measure.

B. But again, that is an ALLEGORY—and when we turn Jesus’ parables into allegories—we rob them of their open-endedness and force them to only mean one thing.

1. Again, let’s take a look at the actions of the CENTRAL FIGURE—in this case the KING—or God.

2. What is the KING doing?

- Again and again he is INVITING people to his banquet.

3. He **invites** his original guests—and when they don’t come, he sends out his servants to **invite** others.

4. He says, “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

- And he **invites** people until the banquet hall is full.

5. What we have here is another parable about the Kingdom of God.

6. And, as we can see in this parable and elsewhere, God’s Kingdom is ALL INCLUSIVE—it’s available to anyone and everyone who **accepts** the invitation;

- God invites EVERYONE to be part of the family.

7. But, if that’s the case—what’s with this part about a person with no wedding garment being cast out “into the outer darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth?”

II. Parable of Preparedness

A. Well, first—a little background.

1. Scholars are pretty confident that this parable was originally a separate one that Matthew, or his source, has added on here.

2. Perhaps Matthew put these two together because they were both about weddings—but more likely Matthew was trying to send a warning to those folks who felt that they had the new invitations, so they didn't have anything to worry about.

3. Now much ink has been spilled about how fair is it to invite someone in off the street to a wedding banquet and expect them to be dressed appropriately—but that's not really the point.

4. What we are really dealing with here is the question: “**HOW FIT ARE YOU** for God's Kingdom—not physically—but how are YOU living into God's Kingdom.

5. It may well be, as one commentator put it: “that neglecting to wear an appropriate garment to the wedding symbolizes the failure to behave in a manner befitting the standards of God's Kingdom.”

6. In other words, it's not enough just to get in—you have to live a life that reflects that **STEADFAST** love of God—you need to be prepared.

B. I am reminded of the story of an **ATHEIST** who spent a quiet day fishing in the Scottish Highlands—when suddenly his boat was attacked by the **LOCH NESS MONSTER**.

1. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat high into the air—then it opened its mouth to swallow them both.

2. As the man sailed head over heels, he cried out, “Oh my God! Help me!”

3. At once the ferocious attack scene froze in place—and as the Atheist hung in **MID-AIR**, a booming **VOICE** came down from the clouds,
- **“I thought you didn't believe in me!”**

4. “Come on God, give me a break!” the man pleaded, “Two minutes ago, I didn't believe in the Loch Ness Monster either.”

C. So, are WE prepared for the Banquet?

- Are we ready to answer God's invitation?

1. What garment are you wearing?

2. Of course by GARMENT we're not talking about your clothes - but instead the garments of your MIND, your HEART, and your SOUL.

3. The garment of EXPECTATION, the garment of FAITH, the garment of READINESS for the Kingdom of God;
- in short, the garment of PREPAREDNESS—of living the life God calls us to live.

III. How do we answer?

A. So, when God's invitation comes to US, how do we react?

1. Are we ready to respond as the SERVANTS, or do we greet God's invitation with EXCUSES?

2. And when we accept that invitation, are we ready to respond?

3. The way we respond, according to the Prayer Book, is to **WORK, PRAY, and GIVE for the spread of the Kingdom of God.**"

4. In other words, the way we respond to God's invitation is by offering our lives: our gifts and talents, and FUNDS to the God who gave them to us.

5. That's STEWARDSHIP—and the question **Stewardship** would have us ask is "How much of what is God's am I going to keep for myself?"

6. STEWARDSHIP is returning to God what is **due**—
STEWARDSHIP is responding to God's INVITATION;
- STEWARDSHIP is living into God's **extravagant, inclusive, steadfast love**, offered to everyone if we only accept it.

7. **Stewardship** is giving out of GRATITUDE for all that has been given to us.

B. This Sunday, we begin our Fall Pledge Campaign for next year's budget.

1. And, as with everything else, the COVID crisis brings with it complications we have never experienced before for Stewardship and next year as well.

2. You have been amazing this year in keeping up with your pledges and, in some cases, giving a little bit extra to help see us through.

3. As we look to next year, more than ever, it's up to us.

4. If we want to see St. Columba's continue—if we want the Food Ministry—and our other Outreach programs—if we want to bring people to a deeper relationship with God—then we have to make it happen and support the on-going life and ministry of St. Columba's.

C. Today, as you pick up your box for the Stewardship Lunch, we will have your pledge packet as well—the other pledge packets will go in the mail this week.

1. As you decide in the coming weeks what you are going to pledge for next year, do so with a spirit of Thanksgiving in your heart.

2. Think about what it means to live a life in response to God's **AMAZING STEADFAST LOVE**.

3. Think about what it means to accept God's **INVITATION** to the Kingdom.

4. And then return a portion of all the good things God has given you back to God for use in God's service—here at St. Columba's, in our community and beyond.

5. But whatever you pledge this year—**PRAYERFULLY** and **CAREFULLY consider** what you are going to give and **WHY**—and then give it in **THANKSGIVING** for all that God has given you.

Conclusion

God has invited US to God's banquet.

And in this invitation, we see God's **STEADFAST** love—offered again and again.

God's invitation is an invitation for all.

God's banquet is a banquet of love

If we are not prepared—if we do not live into God's **STEADFAST** love—we don't have God.

Preparedness is the Key—Love is the Robe.

Put on **your WEDDING ROBE** and join the feast!

Let Us Pray

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

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