

Matthew 22:1–14
20th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
October 22, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our Lord's message to you this morning is summarized in the last line of our Gospel text, Matthew 22:14: "Many are called, but few are chosen." All people are invited to the wedding feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb of God in eternity, but only a small portion of those invited end up coming to the celebration. Earlier in Matthew, in chapter 7[:13–14], Jesus says it like this: "Enter by 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." On the final day, many who called out "Lord, Lord," in this life will be told by Jesus: "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt 7:23).

The sad reality is that most people will end up not in Paradise, but in Hell. Jesus is clear about this throughout the Gospels. It's a sobering truth, and one that many Christians today try to avoid at all costs. The idea of Hell seems so contrary to what we think we know about God and His love, so opposed to God's mercy which has the final word over His righteous judgments. As much as we desire, like God Himself, that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3–4), the fact of the matter is that "many are called, but few are chosen." Most people end up not in Heaven, but in Hell. Jesus makes this reality so crystal clear in His Word as a warning for you to avoid eternal damnation at all costs. Once you know how high the stakes are, you can begin to order your life accordingly.

“Many are called, but few are chosen.” Many are called, but to what? They are called to the wedding feast, to the life of God that begins for you now in time and lasts forever. Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a royal wedding banquet. God the Father is the King. The son getting married is God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God taking upon Himself our human nature and becoming man to join Himself to our flesh is like the union of husband and wife. In fact, the institution of marriage is a picture of the unity between Christ, the Bridegroom and His bride, the Church. As a man leaves father and mother and is united to his wife, so did Jesus leave His Father’s side to be joined to His bride, the church. Jesus, the Bridegroom, takes upon Himself the debt of sin His bride owes. And in turn, He gives to you, His Bride, everything that belongs to Him. This is the marriage that all earthly marriages reflect, however imperfectly.

The servants sent to call those invited to the wedding feast are the prophets, and those invited to the banquet were the Old Testament people of Israel, “Israel according to the flesh.” The message of the prophets in the Old Testament was of a constant refrain: “Repent of your adultery with false gods, return to your true Husband, your Lord and your God. Come to the marriage supper of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, to the one who clothes you with the wedding garment of His righteousness.” But the people would not come. They ignored the invitation and the plea from their true Husband, and instead whored after the gods of their neighbors. They desired to remain in the comfortable life they had built in sin rather than turn from their sinful ways and truly live according to God’s plan and purpose.

Again, the LORD our King sent other servants, the Apostles, saying to the people of Israel in Jesus’s day: “Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.” Jesus,

the Lamb of God, was slaughtered on the cross. There He gave His life for the life of the world. He laid down His life for the life of His Bride, the Church, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph 5). Jesus, the Bridegroom, loved His Bride, the Church, as His own body and gave up His life for her. And He continues to nourish and cherish His Bride in the Word and in the Sacraments, where He joins with you as one body and one soul. This is the wedding feast to which the Apostles invited their fellow countrymen.

But they would not come. They paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest treated the prophets and apostles shamefully and killed them. So it goes even today. Many neglect the preaching of God's Word because they are absorbed in worldly things. They care more about the gains of this life, their retirement plans, or the temporal welfare of their families, and then they neglect the eternal things of God. It seems innocent enough, but to neglect the invitation is to neglect the invitation. Those who don't realize the importance of attending to their salvation right here and right now are on the verge of eternal death.

Most people respond to the invitation to God's Kingdom with indifference. Others seize the King's servants, treat them shamefully, and kill them. That's how it came about that all of Jesus's original Apostles, except one, died horrible deaths at the hands of the Gospel's enemies. They walked the footsteps of their master and died the way He did: as martyrs for the truth of God's Word. Such a fate for Christians is nearer than most realize. Around the world and throughout history, Christians have been persecuted for their faith in Christ. In our context, there's a sort of soft persecution against Christians. As long as you keep your mouth shut and

don't rock the boat with uncomfortable biblical teachings, like the doctrine of Hell, everything will be fine. If you only talk about God's love in general and not about the specific demands of God's Law of love, then the world will leave you alone. Maybe. But that's not who we are called to be as Christians. Don't be ashamed of God's Word. It needs to be spoken into the moral chaos of this world, even if you have to suffer for it.

Those who were originally invited to the Lord's wedding feast, Israel according to the flesh, were not worthy. They rejected the invitation and they rejected those who delivered the invitation, and in doing so they rejected the one who invited them. So God says to His Church: "Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find." Go and make disciples of all nations. This has been the Church's commission from the beginning. Those who were invited rejected the invitation, so invite the others. Here you see the abundant grace of God. He welcomes people of all tribes, families, nations, and languages into His family, the Church. He blesses all the families of the earth in the seed of the woman, in the seed of Abraham, our Lord Jesus Christ. Many are called to eternal life, all people are invited to the feast, but many reject the invitation. Few are chosen, but those chosen, those elected by God's grace, come from all nations. The Lord's servants bring the good and the bad into the wedding hall, filling the place with guests. Those who enter the Kingdom of God come not because they are good or bad, but in spite of what they've done, because they are cleansed of their sins by the blood of Jesus. God no longer counts their trespasses against them.

The next part of this parable is a warning to all those who have answered the Lord's call and come into the church, into the outward fellowship of God's people. This is a warning to all of you. The King entered the wedding hall to look at the guests, and He saw there a man who had no wedding garment. The man wasn't dressed for the occasion. Formal attire only, but the man

decided to come in his street clothes. What is this wedding garment and why is it so necessary? The wedding garment is the righteousness of Jesus that covers all your sins. This wedding garment of Christ's righteousness is received by faith alone, in childlike trust, which is itself a gift of God. In Galatians 3[:26–29], the Apostle Paul says that “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” In Holy Baptism, you are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. God wraps you in Jesus so that He no longer sees your sins. He only sees His Son. Your sinful nature is still there, and you will spend your whole life fighting against it. But your sin is covered. God doesn't hold it against you, and He gives you the strength to overcome the temptations that come your way.

Without this faith in the promises God gives you in your Baptism, without being covered in the righteousness of Christ, you are left standing before God on your own. Without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness, your works are nothing but filthy rags, soiled and stained by all the sins you've committed. There are many people, unfortunately, who come into the wedding hall without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. They come to church, but they don't believe any of this. They reject the promises of their Baptism, they drive away the Holy Spirit, and attempt to stand before God on their own, apart from the righteousness that can only come from Jesus Christ. Who are these people? There are many of them in the outward fellowship of the Christian Church. They have eyes but see not and ears but hear not. They remind us and warn us that many are called, but few are chosen.

Are you scared that you're not part of those few who are chosen for eternal life, that you don't have the strength to make it to the end? If you're not struck by this warning, then ask yourself: “Why not?” Do you believe the words of our LORD: “Many are called, but few are chosen?” If this Word of God frightens you, know this: This truth is intended to save those who

hear it. Jesus doesn't tell you this truth so that you will doubt and despair of your salvation, or resign yourself to fate. This truth ought to make you long for Christ and His salvation. And if you're concerned about this, you can be sure that the work of faith begun in you is not growing cold; it's growing stronger. You're learning to despair of yourself and turn to Jesus Christ alone for all things. Continue by faith to clothe yourself daily in the wedding garment, the righteousness of Christ put on you in your baptism. Examine yourself daily and come to Jesus, casting all your sins and all your burdens on Him. He is the one who suffered punishment in your place and He opens the way to eternal life for you. Remind yourself often that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6). God alone gives and preserves your faith. You are the chosen few. May God strengthen this certainty in all of you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.