

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER MICHAELMAS

Text: St. Matthew 22:1-14

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✱ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The GOD of Holy Scripture, the one and only true GOD, is not what you might picture Him to be. He is not a frail old man with long flowing white hair and beard who is more like the Father Christmas of Charles Dickens stories or the Santa Claus of your childhood than the GOD of the Bible.

Nor is GOD the spirit of Christmas past. He is not the sandal clad, slightly effeminate, flowerchild, made popular in modern imagination and Hollywood movies. He is not a caricature who runs around with a great toothy grin and a big thumbs up. He is not your buddy; He is not your pal. He is not nice like your grandmother or favorite aunt are nice.

No, our God will not be made in our image. He is not a god who conforms to our opinions and sinful lusts and desires. He will not pat you on the head. Neither will He simply wink at your sins. He is not like you—at all. He does not love what you love. He does not desire what you desire. His thoughts are not your thoughts. So, no, GOD, the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, is not like you, and is far from what you imagine Him to be.

He is ALMIGHTY GOD, Creator of all that is visible and invisible. He causes the mountains to tremble and fall; He causes the seas to roar and foam. He makes demands and expects them to be fulfilled. He is perfect righteousness. He is perfect love. And in CHRIST, He is not simply your friend; He is your brother, but first and foremost, He is your LORD and SAVIOR.

GOD is the King of our text who has prepared a wedding feast for His SON, JESUS. He has called His servants to Him and has sent them out to call all those invited to the feast. Those invited have already received their invitations and should be waiting for the fullness of time when they will be called.

The King has invited everyone, overlooking no one. Yet, not all those invited are willing to attend. Those who are absent, are absent by their own choice. They insult the King and kill His servants. They have, so they believe, more important things to which they must attend. They are not worthy. For this, they will face GOD's wrath, but they are not the only ones who will be cast into outer darkness.

Yes, all have been invited. GOD has sent out more servants. They are to gather peoples from every corner of the earth—bad and good. This is good news for us, for it matters not who you are or what sins you may have committed. You are invited. He eats with sinners such as you and me. You are to be seated at the King's table clothed in garments of far more splendor

than even those of King Solomon. You are not to be simply honored guests, but the guests of honor. You are to be the Bride of the King's SON. This feast is for you!

Our FATHER in Heaven has joined the one Holy catholic (universal) Church to CHRIST in the bloody nuptials of JESUS' Cross and crucifixion. He has joined you to CHRIST JESUS in the bloody waters of Holy Baptism. Therefore, the meaning of our LORD's parable is self-evident; the proper wedding garment in the Kingdom of Heaven can be none other than CHRIST and His righteousness, for you are Baptized, having put on CHRIST.

Therefore, be not like the foolish wedding guest who cast off his robe of righteousness in exchange for the rags of his former self, returning to the ways of the world and his old sinful flesh. If you do so, CHRIST's message is clear. You will be bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness where there is only weeping and seething anger.

For this reason, we are to examine ourselves, walking *“circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil,”* because anyone who eats of the Body and Blood of the LORD *“in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the LORD's Body.”*

Therefore, do not look for good apart from the Church of GOD, GOD's Holy Word, your Baptism, the Body and Blood of your SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, in, with, and under the bread and wine of His Holy Supper, and in His blessed Word of Absolution. In these, and these alone, you will find not only GOD's Church, but GOD Himself. If you look anywhere else you will only find grief and misery.

This is the fate, not only of the ill-clad wedding guest of our LORD's parable, but of all those who reject the King's gracious invitation. As our LORD JESUS said, *“Many are called, but few are chosen.”*

Woe upon woe, then, unto those who reject the wedding invitation for they will be crushed by their unbelief. Woe, also, unto those who cast off the righteousness of CHRIST, for they will stand naked and speechless before GOD on the Day of Judgment. They will be judged and condemned and cast out into eternal darkness and despair, for there is no righteousness other than the righteousness of our GOD!

How did this come to be mankind's condition?

With Adam and Eve's fall into sin, we poor sinners were robbed of our magnificent garment of perfect righteousness and holiness. With original sin, to which we continually add our own, we were stripped, beaten, and left for dead at the side of the road, naked and bare. To stand before GOD, we must again be robed in perfect righteousness that our nakedness be covered over. That garment, however, cannot be a righteousness our own, for such righteousness is no righteousness at all. Our righteousness is more akin to a burial shroud than a wedding garment, but CHRIST with His precious merits is the Beautiful Raiment that covers our nakedness shielding us with His righteousness from the heat of GOD's wrath.

So it has been since nearly the beginning of time. GOD lovingly seeks to betroth lost mankind unto Himself, sending forth His servants with His gracious invitation. The Words of Holy Scripture are His invitation to the wedding banquet. Yet, even though GOD has been inviting mankind to the Feast since the fall of Adam and Eve, the majority of mankind has either rejected GOD's gracious invitation outright or have been wedding crashers who try to get into the wedding banquet on their own terms and dressed in their own sinful rags.

So, again, GOD is not like us. He calls fornicators, adulterers, thieves, murderers, liars, perverts, tyrants, bullies, sodomites, and all manner of human vermin, and eats with them. He holds the most lavish feast for them. He bathes them in holy water and adorns them in a garment far more glorious than those of Solomon, and calls them His children.

Robed in this garment, GOD does not see you as you are. He does not see you as a lost, pathetic, and sinful creature, deserving of no more than death. Instead, He sees you as He sees His SON, JESUS. He sees you as His pure, undefiled, and spotless bride, and He grants unto you all the rights and privileges of a true heir of His Kingdom.

So, come and feast on the Word of GOD. For the Gospel of CHRIST is the cradle in which the Kingdom of Heaven is to be found. Come, the King of Heaven is inviting you. I am His called and ordained servant ordered to relay His gracious invitation to you. Come one and all, bad and good, for our King's love is blind and He desires your presence at His table no matter how vile you may have been.

Therefore, the Holy Word of GOD is not for the purpose of telling you how to live your best life now. Neither is it for the purpose of telling you how good you can be if you will only follow GOD's commands. It is for the purpose of telling you how truly evil you are and yet, how merciful is your GOD, and to what lengths He has gone to save you.

That means God's wedding invitation is not given based on the qualifications of those He invites, but on the merits, and works of CHRIST. Because we could not fulfill GOD's demand for perfect righteousness, He sent His SON to take on human flesh and fulfill GOD's demand for us. He, who is without sin became sin for us that we become the righteousness of GOD in CHRIST.

Therefore, no matter how evil you may be, His goodness is greater. No matter how great your sin, His sacrifice is greater. You may not love Him, but He loves you, and with His Blood, He paid the price of your redemption. There is no sin that His Blood does not cover, so come, for now is the Day of your salvation. *"Incline your ear, and come to [the King]. Hear, and your soul shall live."* Hear the voice of JESUS, for the King has made all things ready and He will fill His wedding hall. He wants you there. He desires your presence. He sends you His invitation engraved in His Flesh with nail, lash, and thorn, and written in His Blood.

Come to His Table, you who were called to this place from the highways; who were once not a people, but are now His *"chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people."* Come, you who are called out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once

were not a people but are now the people of GOD; who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained the mercy of GOD. Come and be gathered here around GOD's Word and Sacrament. You are brought to the Feast of our LORD's Body and Blood as His holy, spotless, virgin Bride to whom He has joined Himself in a blessed eternal union through His death on a cross and His resurrection from the grave.

Come to the Feast. JESUS has called you to His Table to commune with Him. In JESUS, our GOD, is present to eat and drink with us. Here, at His altar, JESUS Himself feeds you with the Bread of Life which comes down from heaven. With this precious Meal, we receive eternal life. At this Altar, we are given a foretaste of the Feast to come where we will be seated with JESUS and all the saints and angels to feast in glory with Him forever.

Come and be clothed in the Garment of CHRIST's Righteousness, purchased for you with His death on Calvary that it could be placed on you as you rose up out of the waters of Holy Baptism. Come and take the hand of the Worthy One, feel His embrace and know that you are loved with a love beyond all telling, a love beyond all measure, a love far beyond all human understanding.

Come now and hear what our LORD has to say to you; hear His invitation, *"Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price."* The call has gone out. In the Word of the Gospel, you have received your invitation. In Baptism you received your wedding garment. All that is left to do is to be seated at the Feast to eat the Bread of Heaven. Do not miss it. Hear the invitation. Receive His gifts of salvation and forgiveness and live.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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