

11 October 2020
Pentecost 19

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Feast Now *and* Forever”

Text: Matthew 22:1-14 (Isaiah 25:6-9; Philippians 4:4-13)

Introit: Isaiah 61:10

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

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son . . .

When you hear words such as that, about the kingdom of heaven, your thoughts perhaps immediately go to the future. To the second coming of Christ. To the not here and now, but some time far, far away.

Like, when you pray the Lord’s Prayer. One of the petitions you pray there is *Thy kingdom come*. And most people, I think, tend to believe that is only talking about heaven; that we are only praying for Jesus to come again and take us to heaven.

But that would be a mistake.

Because what we need to realize and remember is that the kingdom of heaven is not just a future hope or dream - the kingdom of heaven is already here and now; the kingdom of heaven has its start on earth. For wherever the King is, there is His Kingdom; there He is ruling for the good of His people.

Now, the kingdom of heaven is, of course, not the same as this world and life, but it is here in this world and life. It is a kingdom hidden within the kingdoms of this world. It is, as one theologian put it, *the resistance* against the corruption and falsehood of this world and her kingdoms. An outpost, an embassy, an oasis of the eternal already in the midst of this world. But it is different, in many ways. For the kingdoms of the world are ruled by the Law; this kingdom is ruled by the Gospel. The kingdoms of this world are passing away; this kingdom will go on for eternity.

So in the Lord’s Prayer, yes, we are praying for Jesus to come again and take us to heaven. Absolutely. But we are also praying that He would keep us in and expand His kingdom on earth - which is the Church. Here, where God rules by the Gospel. Here, where God gives His gifts - gifts that give the eternal: forgiveness of sins, renewal by the Holy Spirit, and victory over sin, death, and the devil. Here, where the eternal is breaking

into the here and now. Here, where the angels, archangels, and all the company are with us - words we are used to hearing, but dare not take for granted - and we join their song of praise, *Holy, holy, holy*.

Now if all of that is true, then if *the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son*, that feast is already here. And, of course, it is. That is the reason you come here each week - to come to the feast and feast on the gifts of the King. The King has called you and you feast on His forgiveness, His Word, and His Body and Blood. Great gifts, to be sure, though maybe they don't look like much. Though maybe, in the opinion of some, there are better gifts in other kingdoms. So don't waste your time . . . Find your happiness in the things of this world. Fill yourself with the feasts of those other kingdoms you live in, *their* delights.

There were some in the parable who thought that way. They either ignored the invitation of the King, or were hostile to Him and His servants. *It doesn't turn out good for them* . . .

So why? Why not come? Well, perhaps we could compare this to people who get invited to the White House - *people who have accomplished something great or sports teams that win championships, but they say no; they do not want to go*. Why not? Because they do not like the president or the things He says or does, so they are too busy, or too this or too that.

So it is with God, our King. There are people who do not like Him, His Word, His ways. Who think He should be running things differently. Who think what God says is right is really wrong, and what He says is wrong is really right. So they do not come. But as the parable says, *it's not going to turn out good for them in the end* . . .

Because the King is the king whether you like Him or agree with Him or not. Now on earth, with kings and presidents and worldly rulers, sometimes you get good ones and sometimes not so good ones. Sometimes even evil ones. You can disagree with how they rule and what they do. But to reject or ignore the King of heaven and earth because you don't like what He says, or you think what He does is wrong, or that you could run things better than He, or that you are too busy or have more important things to do, *that is something quite different* . . .

And it wasn't just the people who refused to come who did this - but also the man who came and had no wedding garment, the clothing of the wedding. The clothing we sang of in the Introit: *for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness*. To come to the feast without the wedding garment is therefore to come not with the robe of righteousness that God has for you in Christ, but with your own robe, your own righteousness. *Notice, that doesn't turn out good either* . . .

And here is perhaps especially where you and I need to pay attention. For we're here, right? You've come to church today. You've heeded the invitation of the King. You're not like those who stay away, reject, and refuse to come. That's good . . . but don't hurt yourself patting yourself on the back too hard! For here's the warning for those who do come: *where's your wedding garment?*

Now the man in the parable was speechless. He had nothing to say. Was it because of fear? Or pride? We're not told. But you cannot come here and be speechless. Because in this kingdom of heaven here on earth, **to be speechless is to be without the wedding garment.**

Here's why: there are three main things we speak as we gather here each week. **First**, we speak of our sins and sinfulness. We confess, as we did this morning: *we are by nature sinful and unclean; we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Lord, have mercy.* But if we are speechless - either from our mouths, or if we just mouth the words but we do not believe them - then we are confessing the opposite: *I am good, I am righteous, I need no mercy.* And then we are *without* the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness and forgiveness.

The **second** thing we speak, we confess, is our King in the Creed. Who He is and what He has done for us. Our baptismal faith. But if we are speechless - again, either from our mouths, or if we just mouth the words but we do not believe them - then we are confessing the opposite: *who I am and all that I do.* And again, we are without the wedding garment that comes only by grace through faith in Christ.

And then the **third** thing we speak here is praise - we confess our King's goodness and mercy and life which He has for us here. But if we are speechless, from our mouth or from our hearts, then it is our own praise we seek, putting me on the pedestal or on the throne, wearing our own goodness and righteousness and not Christ's. *And it will not turn out good for us . . .*

So we speak. All these things. But even more importantly, **God speaks.** To us. His Absolution, His forgiveness, His life. **And in the speaking is the giving** - from Him by grace, to us through faith. Faith in the Word spoken to us and in the one who speaks them. Words that wash. Words that feed. Words that clothe us with the wedding garments.

And thus clothed, we have a place here. Not because we are good and righteous, but because He makes us so. So if you are worried or anxious, whether you are clothed or not - don't look at yourself or what you do. You'll find no comfort there! Your penitence will never be enough or good enough. You'll see your sins and shortcomings. Instead, **look** at the one who invited you here to receive his gifts; your Bridegroom. Look at His cross. See His love there for you. See your sins on Him because He wanted them. And **hear**

Him. The word of forgiveness He speaks not to those better than most, but for those who put Him there on the cross. And now spoken to you, too. To you who are not better than most, from Him who is better - and greater - than all.

That's a pretty good feast, it seems to me. Despite what some may think. **And yet there is another still to come** . . . that we cannot even begin to imagine.

Something like I experienced after the first wedding I ever did. In my church in New York. Laurie and I were invited to the reception and we walked into a room filled with food. There were tables in the middle, tables on the sides, filled with food better than this up-til-recently bachelor and poor seminarian had ever seen. There was also wine and whatever drinks you could want. Laurie and I marveled. We took our plates and were enjoying this buffet quite a lot . . . We thought this was a great reception! And then two doors at the far end of the room opened and we were told the seating for the feast would begin. *Wait, what?* We couldn't believe it. This, it turns out, was just a taste of what was to come . . .

As it is in the kingdom of heaven. *Right now* the kingdom is coming, the kingdom of grace, and there are wonderful riches of grace here for us. A feast in its own right, and we marvel and rejoice in it. But as the prophet Isaiah said, there is another feast still to come. More and better than you can imagine. This is just a taste. You can't imagine what it will be like when the doors finally are opened to you . . . Not just when you die, but as Isaiah said, *when death is swallowed up forever*. And *It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

But that joy, that life, as the apostle Paul said, begins already now. For the kingdom of heaven is already here and now. For the King is here and His gifts are here and for you now. Which is what we just spoke - in song, in the final stanza of the hymn right before this sermon:

Gone the bliss of Eden's garden, Gone the age of sacrifice;

We don't live in those times anymore . . .

Ours the time of grace and favor, Ours the call to paradise!

That is, the invitations have gone out and are still going out, to come and receive the grace and favor of the King and His feast.

*Ever, Lord, impress upon us: Only You can cover sin -
So Take our worthless, self-made garments;*

Clothe our shame and cleanse within. (LSB #572 v. 6)

Clothe our shame. Clothe us with Your righteousness and cleanse us with Your forgiveness. That is what we need, and what He has promised to provide. The wedding garment we receive now, and wear forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.