

Lectionary 28 A
Not Quite a Free Meal

October 15, 2023
Matthew 22:1-14

Everybody is invited to the wedding banquet. Getting in was easy. You had to be alive ... and willing to accept the invitation.

The first group invited were not willing to accept the invitation. Our translation says: "They made light of it." More literally, they don't *care* about this invitation. It means nothing to them. This implies that the king means nothing to them.

What these people did by refusing the invitation was an act of rebellion against the authority of the king. Remember: this section of Matthew began with the chief priest and the elders asking Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things?"¹ Jesus indicates that authority can either come from heaven or other people. All the stories we've seen since then were about authority – whether one obeyed it or not. In this parable, those people reject the authority of the king. They do whatever they want to do. They do not do what the king asked them to do. It was an act of rebellion. The king responded harshly against those who made light of his invitation; who ignore his invitation; who reject his authority.

At the same time, the king is very gracious to everyone else – both good and bad. They are all invited to the banquet. There's free food. Just show up.

However, that's not how our text ends. It's not quite a free meal.

There's the one guest who is not dressed appropriately. This was the wedding of the king's son. I suspect that if any of you were invited to the wedding of a president's daughter – a president you liked and voted for – you would be wearing your best clothes – or even rent better clothes than you own. You wouldn't be showing up in your everyday clothes.

Someone who would come to such a festive and special event in shabby attire is dishonoring the host and showing contempt for the occasion. He doesn't really want to participate in the party. Like a child who refuses to wear a party hat. He or she doesn't really want to participate in the festivities.

The wedding guest in our text who refused to dress properly for the occasion is really no better than the first people invited who showed their contempt for the king by not attending this most important event. He doesn't honor the authority of the king.

We might hear him say, "I'm going to wear what I want to wear. I don't care what anybody thinks about my clothes." He is thrown out. The wedding feast is not quite a free meal. Those attending are expected to honor the king and the king's son. Those attending are expected to share in the joy of the king at this most festive event. One way of doing that is to dress appropriately for the event. It means participating fully in the festivities.

Being Christians is more than just attending church, reading your Bibles, receiving the sacraments, expecting heaven after death. We are expected to honor God and God's son in all that we do. We are expected to respect the authority that God has over us. We are expected to share in the joy of salvation – not just for ourselves, but for all people for whom Jesus has died. Christianity is more than just a free meal. God has expectations of us as God's children.

The image of clothing also comes up in other passages. Paul writes in Ephesians and

¹ Matthew 21:23

Colossians “to clothe yourself with the new self”² that comes with Christ. Later in Colossians he writes: “clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”³ In Romans and Galatians he talks about being clothed with Jesus Christ.⁴

It is not enough to be a member of a Christian church, it is not enough to claim an invitation to God’s wedding feast at the end of time, it is not enough to want to share in the great benefits of God’s free gift of grace; we are expected to give allegiance and honor to God with our entire lives. We are to see ourselves as people who have been clothed with Christ. Jesus Christ should be seen by others in all that we say and do. When God the Father looks down on us, he sees Jesus Christ, because Jesus has been wrapped all around us. It is not quite a free meal. We are to remove our old selfish selves through daily repentance and put on Jesus Christ each day.

In Isaiah the prophet uses clothing and wedding images:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for **he has clothed me**
with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me
with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.⁵

The clothing God requires from us, God gives us. The response of the recipient would be, first of all, to accept what God gives and, secondly, to rejoice and exult in the gracious, giving God. Like children putting on the hat and joining in the games.

The wedding banquet of the king is not quite a free meal. We are expected to wear the proper clothing, which is not really about clothes, but it means: (1) We need to gratefully accept the king’s invitation to share in his joy. It will cost us some time.

(2) We need to show the proper respect for the authority of the king over our life – my concerns, farm, business, even comfort come behind honoring the king. It may cost me some of my selfish desires.

(3) We need to “put on” the Christian life and bear the proper fruit of responding to the king’s invitation to a joyful life. It will cost us our lives as we die to self so that God can raise us up anew.

(4) We need to receive the “garments of salvation” and the “robes of righteousness” that God has given us. It costs us our feeble attempts to save ourselves. As such it can cost us our pride in trying to do it ourselves. Salvation is not something we do, but a gift from God. To which we can only respond with thankful appreciation and jubilant celebration – like at being invited to a scrumptious wedding feast of a king – we come with humble respect and great awe at being invited to the party.

Finally, to get very specific, belonging to a congregation is not quite a free meal. While

² Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10

³ Colossians 3:12

⁴ Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27

⁵ Isaiah 61:10

you enter our doors for free – no one has to buy a ticket to get in. You share in this holy meal for free. You won't be getting a bill after you've eaten. Members are expected to contribute money to fund the ministries of this congregation. Members are also expected to participate as they are able – to give of their time. This morning the emphasis is on finances as you turn in your pledges for 2024.

It is your response to the grace God has shown you. Hopefully, some of that grace has been through this congregation and its ministries. It is your response to being under the authority of God, seeking to faithfully manage all that God has given you: your selves, your time, and your possessions. That's biblical stewardship.