

**Oct. 11, 2020  
Christ the Servant,  
Pentecost 19  
Matthew 22:1-14**

**Jesus told his disciples a parable about a wedding banquet. It is an interesting story. But I bet if Hollywood were telling the story they'd put a spin on it. Here's how Hollywood might tell the story: The daughter of the governor of the state is getting married. He sends out an invitation for a Governor's Mansion garden wedding. He sends the invitations to all the important state movers and shakers. However, the regrets start coming back in the mail. One senator has to be in his district to cut a ribbon for a new sewage treatment plant. Another has root canal surgery planned. The media picks up on the news that the governor is being deliberately snubbed. So, in what becomes the public relations coup of the century, the governor throws the mansion garden open to anyone and everyone. They are all invited inside afterward for a grand reception and this story has a very happy ending.**

**While the Hollywood version is more contemporary, the Biblical story actually has a lot more action. Here, it is a king who throws a huge, expensive wedding banquet for his son. He invites people to come. But they snub him with lame excuses. One has to tend his business. The other, his farm. Not only do they snub the king, but they mistreat his slaves who have brought the invitations. So, the king kills those who were invited and burns down their city. Then he sends his slaves to the highways and byways to gather all the ordinary citizenry. Can you tell he's angry? The guests say yes and the wedding hall is filled with guests.**

**When I was growing up, my family had a weekend cabin out in the country. My mother and dad liked to have big barbeques and invite people out.**

One particular weekend Dad had roasted what seemed like a whole quarter of beef. Mother had worked for days on side dishes and had baked desserts. When the appointed hour came for the guests to arrive – no one came. So, Dad went out in search of the nearest phone which he found at the neighbor's at the end of the lane. He called the guests back in town one by one. They all had weak excuses, but it was apparent that they had just forgotten or had more important things to do. Dad was livid. I can still remember how red in the face he was from anger (and maybe way too much beer.) On the phone he verbally cast each of them into the outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

When he hung up the phone he looked at the neighbor family and said, "You are going to eat steak tonight!" It was more of a command than it was an invitation. So, the mom and dad gathered up their two sleeping children and came to the cookout. Then Dad went down the lane the other way and knocked on the door of the poor family who didn't have electricity and bathed all their kids in a big tub on the kitchen floor Saturday nights. Same sort of "invitation." "You're coming up to our place for dinner!" Well, by the time they all came, dad had calmed down and everybody ended up having a good time.

Now, whether you are listening to the Hollywood version, the biblical version, or my personal version, there are some things in common. The big guy gets snubbed. He has gone to a lot of work and care and people end up not accepting the invitation because they are too ... too... too what? How would *you* end this sentence? Why didn't people come? Maybe because they were too corrupt? Now, that would make sense. Let's tell the story that one person can't come because he is having an affair. Another can't come because he isn't sober enough. Another is too busy skimming money from his business. Wouldn't that make sense? Moral corruption!

**But, as it is, the reasons people give for not coming are everyday, ordinary things. Business. Farming. Just the plain SOS – Same Ole Stuff. And this doesn't make sense at all. It is the governor inviting them, for goodness sake. And the banquet is a great one. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And people say no because they have to do today what they did yesterday – and the day before.**

**Did you know there is an entire website devoted to excuses which people send in about why they don't go to church? Just Google "excuse list." Here are some of the actual excuses: "I work six days a week and the seventh belongs to me! I don't have time for God. I'll get religion in my next life. It's too cold in there – why don't they turn up the heat? It's too hot in there – why don't they turn the heat down?" You get the idea.**

**I suppose that, if church were a place where you just come to sing songs, sit through a sermon, and drink coffee then those excuses might make sense. But, isn't church actually a banquet which our heavenly father has thrown in honor of his son? When we gather, don't we gather in the presence of the almighty? Aren't we awed by that? When we hear the Word of God aren't we hearing the very history of our salvation and the promise of a full life in God's kingdom? Although we are currently quarantined from Holy Communion, when we have partaken and when we will once again partake, aren't we enjoying a grand banquet which is only a foretaste of the grandest banquet which is to come -- a party which begins now and continues throughout all eternity?**

**I think some of the anger my dad experienced that night out at the cabin when the guests didn't show up was from hurt. His feelings were hurt that he had been snubbed. But he was even more hurt that all the work my mother had put into cooking and baking had been treated lightly. So, when he stood in front**

of the neighbors with fierce eyes and said, “You come!” they were a mite inclined to do just that.

I have an idea there’s a bit of that in the way *our* heavenly father invites us to his banquet. I’m suspecting he isn’t just saying to us, “Hey, try to come to worship. You might like it. We have great music, good singing, and Bible centered sermons. Sure do hope you will come!” No. I wonder if God’s invitation doesn’t sound more command-like: “Look. I’ve put my heart and soul into this. I’ve given you a promise that doesn’t fail. I’ve given you my promise that I will be with you always, even to the end of the age. I’ve sent my very own son to die for you. I’ve given you Holy Scripture. I hold a banquet each week. I’ve offered this to others and they have declined. What I have is too good to throw away. You! Come! Now!

If you are watching me preach this, then you have come to the banquet and now you are an inviter. You and I are the ones who have said “yes” to the command. If we hadn’t, we wouldn’t be here. We are now the ones who go out on behalf of the king and announce the banquet. So much of our outreach has revolved around the “soft invitation.” “You’ll like it here. We have good programs. Our people are friendly. You’ll get along.” But I’m wondering if we don’t need to have a greater sense of urgency about us. You! You *must* come to the Lord’s banquet. The Word is here. Jesus is here. Forgiveness is here. Deliverance is here. Eternal life is here. Nowhere else. Others have said yes. You cannot *not* say yes. You *must* say yes.

Welcome to the banquet, brothers and sisters in Christ. There are still seats available. Let’s fill them.