

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher.³

“For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the twenty-second Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“Jesus said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith [SETH] he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: and he saith [SETH] unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

The Gospel for this morning contains a parable consisting of two parts, each being very significant in its own right. Of course, all three synoptic Gospels contain this parable in some fashion, but it is only St. Matthew's Gospel that places these as acts of the king, and adds the *caveat* concerning the wedding garment.

Jesus said, “*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding.*” Now before we continue on, let us grasp an understanding of what the Kingdom of heaven is, and what it is not. When modern preachers reference the wedding feast for the kingdom, they reference this as something that happens at the end of the age.

After just celebrating the Feast of All Saints, we learned that to be in the presence of God, one embarks on the journey of eternal life. And our lives as Christian faithful bear witness to the nature of eternity itself, and how knowing the nature and shape of eternity can shape the way we live our lives as a witness to the power of Christ in our lives here and now! So it is that Jesus offers a glimpse of what eternal life is like in His sermon we call the Beatitudes.⁶ Notice the present tense: for the poor-the kingdom *is* theirs. It is theirs *now*, not later.

Eternal life, the Kingdom of Heaven, is not a “pie in the sky, get there when I die” reality. The moment we choose Christ, and are born again in baptism, we enter into eternal life. Why? Because our present reality is consummated by God's eter-

nal presence. And as we embark upon death, our lives do not end, but our tabernacles are changed. Eternity is perpetual presence –presence with God. The world to come is not only a hereafter but a “here and now” for those who live in God’s eternal presence.

But getting back to our Gospel lection, those that were bidden to the wedding and its feast, were the children of Israel. And we see that time after time, God the Father, as represented by the king in our parable, would send forth His servants to bid them continuously to come. We hear the voice of the prophets throughout Sacred Scripture calling the Nation to come unto God with a heart of repentance, which would have allowed their present reality to be consummated by God’s eternal presence. And we see continuously that the call was not heeded. As a matter of fact, the call was irritating to them, so they snuffed out the voice of those calling, and they killed the prophets.

The king heard of this and he sent his armies and destroyed those who murdered his servants. And since Matthew’s Gospel was written to a Jewish audience to provide them proof that Jesus’ Kingdom was the fulfillment of the Davidic Kingdom, these words must have been harsh to read. The Gospel of Matthew was written around 85 AD, some 15 years after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the armies of Rome. Not one stone was left upon another, just as Jesus had predicted.

The Jewish people had been scattered. The army chased the remnant of the nation south from Jerusalem into the Judean hills. Eventually, they dealt with them at a place called Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea. Within the text of this parable, we see an indictment to those Jews who read and were not yet within the economy of Salvation. The nation of Israel was no more, or as Jesus puts it in His parable, “The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.”

And so provisions were made that would allow anyone to come to the feast. The king tells his servants to go out into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. After Christ became the propitiation of our sins on the altar of the Cross, He sent out the Apostles to all nations to preach the Gospel, to bid all that would come to the marriage feast. And we are those who were found in the highways and the hedges.

You are sitting here this morning as benefactors of God's provision because of Israel's rejection. Not to say that some will not come unto Him, but we have been grafted into the vine by the new and everlasting Covenant. This parable explains fully the need for the new Covenant, and in just a few short lines, Jesus gives us an outline of salvation history.

But what is this wedding and wedding feast? The king made a marriage for his son. The nuptials could not take place until those who were bidden came. Why? Because in the context of this story and salvation history, those who were bidden, those invited, were not just guests, they were the bride. God wanted a people united unto Himself, to share with them His divinity. He wanted to consummate their present reality with His eternal presence to embark together upon a life of eternity. To restore what was lost by the sin of Adam shortly after the creation of man and the world, so that Creator and His creation would be joined in a visible union.

This God of love in whom we serve, through grace, and no merit of their own, had chosen the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to become the object of His affection. He has not cut them out off, but has graciously bid to all those who would come, from all other nations, to become the object of His affection. The provisions that were provided for His elect are now open to all who will come to Him by faith through grace. And now we, who are undeserving, can come and be united with Him for all eternity.

After being united to Him, we are called to participate in this wedding feast. This feast is unlike any other. We see that after God made provisions for the Hebrew children just before their exodus out of Egypt. He established a feast that would not only commemorate what He was about to do, but would bring those who partook of this feast to a re-presentation of the action, merit and benefit of the mighty hand of God at work, and which they can celebrate as free men no longer under the bondages of slavery.

God ordered a male lamb to be slaughtered, and the blood of that lamb, which was smeared over the door post of all dwellings of the Jewish faithful, was a sign to the angel of death, to pass over that dwelling. The blood was the sign of the covenant of God's provision. That lamb was then taken and prepared in a ritual fashion

to be eaten by those under the provision. The act of consuming the lamb was the seal of the covenant.

We also see in the heavenly liturgy, as revealed to St. John the beloved in the book of Revelation, that on the altar, in the midst of the throne and the elders, stood a lamb as though it had been slain. This Lamb was the Christ, the Son of the living God, whose blood has been shed and smeared over the door post of the earthly tabernacles of all those Christian faithful who participate in the wedding feast.

This blood is a sign to the angel of death, to pass over the dwellings of these earthly vessels. But the Lamb also gives us His Flesh to eat, and is the seal of the covenant, as a meal for us to partake in, that not only commemorates the work that Christ has done, but brings to those who partake of this feast to a re-presentation⁷ of the action, merit and benefit of the mighty hand of God at work, and why we can celebrate as free men no longer under the bondages of slavery to sin.

This is the wedding feast, where the food and drink is Christ's own Body and Blood. He invites us so that we can feast on Him, the Bride Groom. This is an act of consummation where our present reality is consummated by His Eternal presence, so that we can be visibly united to Him, and in turn, be united to the King, God the Father Almighty, to be restored unto His likeness, that which was lost by the sin of Adam.

Here in our worship, in our liturgy, we don't replicate the future wedding feast, the liturgy in heaven. We don't have to wait until death or the end of the world to partake in this feast. But here and now, we participate in the heavenly liturgy. The Mass that we celebrate, every Sunday and feast day, is the heavenly banquet, the eternal meal, the liturgy of heaven. Every time we celebrate this Eucharist, we experience heaven on earth.

But then we see the *caveat* in Saint Matthew's account of this parable. When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. In the anteroom to the great banquet hall, hanging up were the robes of the wedding party and all that were invited. To have a place within the festivities one would have to be clothed in the right garments. This man came in from the highways and the hedges, and did not feel the need to clothe himself, yet still participate

in the festivities. The king immediately had him bound hand and foot, and cast out into the outer darkness.

After all that had been done and provisions made, this man did not feel that it was important enough to put on the garment of his provision. That he could just show up and approach the feast in any way he pleased. He probably felt that the king should have been grateful, just for the effort he made in being there. But we see that the king was not patient with his nonchalance.

Mere attendance, Jesus says, was not enough. He wanted him clothed in the clothes of righteousness, which can only happen by the restorative, transformational power of faith through grace, coming to the fullness of the power of the love of God through repentance. We are a people in need of grace, and if we approach this feast without putting on the clothes of His righteousness through repentance, will the King put up with our nonchalance?

As we approach this feast, the most blessed sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, let us call to mind all that God has done for us, the provisions that He has made, for us to see the heartache that He has suffered throughout the ages in bidding men to come to His marriage feast and their refusal. Let us realize that we must approach this altar with repentance, clothed in the righteousness of God, so the He can feed us with the food of eternity, and allow our present realities to be consummated by His eternal presence.

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Ecclesiastes 9:4-10 (KJV).

⁴ "Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Matthew 22:1-14 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 5.

⁷ In Greek, *anamnesis*.

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