

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This seems to be the season for parables. I say this because this is our fourth week running that we have been presented with a parable within the appointed Gospel text. This term “parable” is from the Greek word, *παραβολή* which means “comparison.” A parable is nothing more than a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God’s kingdom, actions, or expectations and something in this world, real or imagined.¹ A comparison of something we know and understand to something we cannot begin to understand, such as the Kingdom of God or even God.

I want to stress this comparison because the parable before us today begins like most of the parables that Jesus teaches, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...”. Sometimes Jesus will say, “For the kingdom of heaven is like...”. This ought to be for us, the listener, an indication that this “parable” or this comparison is not going to be confined to our understanding that is based on or undergirded within our paradigms and context. In other words, there is a side of this comparison that we will not fully comprehend but this incomprehensible side is “like” something we know and are familiar with. Once again, I am stressing this because the “king” in the parable that is before us today can cause some visceral reactions...simply put, he’s not a very nice guy, and that was just one of the nicest things that was said about this king at our Bible Study this past Tuesday. But the kingdom of heaven is like, or may be compared to a king who is God in order to explain God to those Jesus is addressing and even to us.

Like it or not, this king in this parable, who seems to be a very nasty king is being compared to God. And we hear that the king has prepared a very fine feast for the guests who end up making light of the invitation. They snub the king and return to their farms, their businesses, and others, just for no other reason, refuse to attend the feast, and still others seized the slaves sent to gather the invited guests, and mistreated them and even killed some of them. In turn, the king sends his military to kill those who murdered his slaves and then the king ordered the city do be burned. After all of that, the king then sends his slaves to gather folks off the streets...good and bad. And the last straw in this parable is the man not wearing a wedding robe who is bound and thrown out, into the outer darkness among the weeping and gnashing of teeth. But again, the kingdom of heaven MAY BE compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

When discerning this parable, we need to think outside of the box. And yes, I know the gut reaction is to refuse to see this king as God, but as I said out the outset, we have been in a run of parables and Jesus is attempting to teach us of the kingdom of God. Jesus is inviting us into a better understanding of God’s kingdom, God’s actions, and even God’s love. However, when it doesn’t suit our understanding or it ruffles our assumptions about God, we too refuse the invitation into a deeper and more challenging discernment about God and we return NOT to our farms and businesses, but we walk away and return to our comfortable assumptions and understandings about the god we construct within our assumptions and understandings. So for a moment, let’s just step past our feelings and our assumptions and look at this line of parables that Jesus has just taken us through over the last few weeks. In the last few chapters of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus has had an ongoing conversation with a very specific group of people, the temple elite and the temple aristocracy, those leaders with a tremendous responsibility to steward some of the most important

¹ Arlund J. Hultgren in, *The Parables of Jesus, A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. The Parables of Jesus: An Introduction, A. Identifying and Classifying the Parables of Jesus, pages 2-3.

rituals and symbols in Judaism in that day.² And he is using this type of comparison because these leaders have been invited into this responsibility and they have abused it...in a sense, they have refused God's invitation of grace and turned to their corrupt sense of religious power and authority. These leaders have been invited to God's feast and they have refused God's way and have gone about their own way. These men who have been invited into this role are using religion to prey on others and hold it as a power over them.

They have refused to vest themselves in God's precepts that are set for all...the good and the bad as Jesus tells us in this parable. This is who Jesus is telling this parable to. But let me ask the gathering right now to do something I asked the folks who were at the Tuesday morning Bible study to do. Just suppose you came in here this morning and I addressed you up front here dressed in ripped up jeans, a dirty tee-shirt, and a pair of flip-flops and said that all the things we did in worship really don't mean anything so we are going to ignore them and do as I say. As far as any sermon, forget about it, we will gossip about those who are not here and talk about all that is wrong in the world and in our politics and those who do not agree with us, can just leave, but before you do, make sure you give your offering to me and not the church.

Now seriously consider that for a moment. Consider this, because...this is what Jesus was addressing in the temple with the religious authority at that time. But Jesus was not only addressing the leaders and the religious elite, he is also addressing us today in this parable. Listen again to the closing of the parable:

¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. (Matthew 22:11-12)

This is the part that really angers us, especially when we compare God to this king who is saying and doing this. Right away we react to this by saying that our faith is not about our appearance or what we wear...but is Jesus talking about clothing here? This is a parable, it is a comparison. St. Peter's First Epistle speaks to this very thing that is happening in this parable as he addresses the women at that time:

³ Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; ⁴ rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.
(1 Peter 3:3-4)

No, it's not about what we wear, I would whole heartedly agree, but what Jesus is asking within this parable is the same thing Peter is getting at in his letter, what do we wear on the inside...and how does that appear out in public? Do we even wear our faith in public? Do we simply wear our faith when we choose? This wedding robe is our faith and when asked, are we silent? Listen again to how Luther explains Baptism in the Large Catechism:

Thus, we must regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: "But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body." No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than

² This comment about the temple aristocracy is from Matthew Skinner during the podcast entitled, *Sermon Brainwave*, #1106 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, www.workingpreacher.org

baptism, for through it we become completely holy and blessed, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.³

This entire parable reminds us that the invitation to the banquet goes way beyond feasting and rejoicing with the king...and even though we are invited a couple of times, the invitation is never rescinded. We have been Baptized, we have been invited into God's kingdom...now what? Do we too, hide our faith and remain silent? What do we do with that invite?

In Baptism we remember that we are liberated from sin and death. We remember also that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ...we are vested in faith through the Holy Spirit and clothed with the cross of Christ. But also let us not forget that we are CLOTHED in the righteousness of Christ. Or as St. Paul informed the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
(Galatians 3:27)

Our Baptism is *our* invite into God's kingdom and there seems to be a "dress-code." This "dress-code" is the faith given to us and a faith that defines us, it is who we are as Baptized Christians. We are Baptized...we have been clothed in God's love and righteousness. Knowing this then, do we say nothing at all? Do we even go as far as remove these garments that God has clothed us in by putting on our own self-righteousness or by putting on our own self-justification?

We are all sent, but can what God has clothed us in be seen beyond these walls, or do we do nothing or say nothing like the man does in this parable when asked, how did he get into the banquet without a wedding robe? Remembering that in our Baptism we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ...may we remember also that we are told to:

"Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

May our faith then light the darkness of this world that we are sent into so that Christ may be revealed in it. Like it or not, there is a dress code and it is called faith...faith...that is what God Himself has clothed us in when we were Baptized. If we have the faith, we say we have, how then does it appear? In that faith there is a fidelity and responsibility and that responsibility becomes the manifestation of that faith in the world around us and towards others we encounter in this world.

Yes, through the waters of our Baptism we have been invited, but looking closer at this parable we ought to notice that those who should be expected to accept the invitation are the ones who refused to come...the unexpected ones are the ones who are gathered in. In other words, our Baptism is not something we can put on and take off when we choose, our Baptism, like our faith is a constant, just like God's love for us. Our Baptism, our faith is our mission, this means our entire identity and our way of living are defined by a continuous purpose, God's promise made to all in Jesus Christ.

³ Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. Fourth Part: Concerning Baptism, page 462, par 44-46

Through the waters of our Baptism, our faith makes us as Isaiah reminds us today in our Old Testament reading:

⁴ For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. (Isaiah 25:4)

This is the feast that invites all who are vested with the vision to see the Son and believe in him, this is our faith that invites all without regard for their socioeconomic standing or their presumed moral condition to the feast of rich food, of bread and wine...that is Jesus Christ. And in this Holy Feast, God has destroyed the shroud of death that is cast over all peoples and spread over all nations. In this wedding feast that is before us now in this bread and wine, the Lord GOD, our King of kings, will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for through our garments of faith we have a seat at God's glorious table of salvation.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.