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October 15, 2023, The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
*Isaiah 25:1-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14*

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

Jesus concludes today's parable with these words: "Many are called but few are chosen."

How does one respond to that? I can't help but thinking to myself, "what about me? Will I be chosen?" And then I remember that I am baptized! I have been chosen, I have been called, and you have too! For you have been baptized into the people of God and you have come today to His banquet! And if you are not yet baptized, you soon can be! Just speak to one of us pastors and we would be delighted to prepare you for baptism!

One might wonder, however, is baptism enough? Is it a sure thing? Is it the one thing that absolutely guarantees one's salvation? Does the sacrament of Baptism absolutely certify one's eternity in the kingdom of God?

Maybe a better way to get at the question I am posing is this; is it possible that by neglecting one's baptism – by turning away from the One in whose name we are baptized – that we may risk ending up like the man at the end of the parable who was banished from the wedding feast because he wasn't wearing the proper garment?

This is the thing that I find troubling about this parable, maybe you do too. I find myself wondering about that poor man who was cast out of the wedding reception because he did not have on the proper attire! Really? What is the significance of the wedding garment? I will come back to that in a moment. I will also come back to the question about baptism. Back to the parable.

Did you notice how this parable goes up and down and up and down again? First there is the joy of the marriage feast of the king's son. All the preparations were made, the banquet hall was decorated, the food was prepared – all was ready! But then all those who were invited had the audacity to refuse to come.

Have you ever prepared a party only to have no one show up to enjoy it? What a disappointment that would be! All the excitement and anticipation of celebrating with your friends, and no one bothers to come! Not only did the invited guests not show up, but they treated the king's messengers badly and

even killed them! That makes the king very angry! In the end he says that they were not worthy!

Let's linger with that for a moment. What is it that made them unworthy? It's not because they were good or bad, as we will see in the very next verses. I would suggest that it was because their priorities were all wrong. They failed to appreciate what they were really being invited into. This is nothing less than the Kingdom of Heaven! The marriage feast of the Lamb. But no, their hearts were elsewhere, focused on earthly matters. Not that earthly matters are not important for us, but when the Lord beckons us to come, I think we had better come!

If Jesus is truly our Lord, and we belong to his kingdom, it is proper that we listen to Him and obey his commands. For we know that our Lord is not demanding and stern. He is not a tyrant or a bully. No, He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love! He is our Creator and has blessed us with so many gifts, including life itself! Every breath we take, everything we have, all our health and strength, our talents and abilities come from our Lord who provides for us out of His gracious love. Indeed, it is only in Him that we live and move and have our being! And now, this is the One who invites us to a party – a celebration – a feast! To have such a Lord as this, we should, as St. Paul says, rejoice!

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

Back to the ups and downs of our parable. Since those invited guests won't come to the marriage feast, the king sends his servants out to invite anyone and everyone they meet – both good and bad – so that his banquet hall may be filled with people celebrating and enjoying the feast. Did you catch that? They invite both the good and the bad, (perhaps even the ugly)! They are all welcomed to this great feast! There are no limitations here, no pre-requisites or requirements. All are invited to join in the celebration, just as Isaiah had proclaimed so long ago in our first reading this morning:

<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for *all peoples* a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. <sup>7</sup>And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over *all peoples*, the veil that is spread over *all nations*. (Isaiah 25:6-7)

So, the banquet hall is filled with people – all kinds of people – from the highways and byways. They have come to celebrate with the king and his son.

But then, the king comes in and sees this one guy without a wedding garment

on and he has him bound and thrown out! I mean really thrown out to where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! It kind of feels like we're on a roller coaster, doesn't it?

So, what is it that ails the man without the wedding garment? Listen to what Gregory the Great says about this:

We are correct when we say that love is the wedding garment because this is what our Creator himself possessed when he came to the marriage feast to join the church to himself. Only God's love brought it about that his only begotten Son united the hearts of his chosen to himself. John says that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for us." (*Forty Gospel Homilies*)

Our Lord, who knows us far better than we know ourselves, sees our hearts and knows us inside and out. (See Psalm 139) He could see that this man was there for the wrong reasons. His heart was not stirred by love, or at least the desire to be more loving – to be more like Jesus.

Who among us can claim to always be motivated by love? We are reminded that we often do not love as we ought as we say these words in the confession at the beginning of our liturgy week after week:

We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Yes, we know full well that we fail in love, but also know that we earnestly want to do better. And so, we turn to Our Lord for he is the only one whose love we can count on, whose mercy is never failing, who never grows weary of forgiving us, and yes, who died for us that we might live both abundantly and eternally with Him in His kingdom.

By seeking to follow our Lord Jesus, learning from Him, and trying to be a bit more like Him day by day, our hearts will be where they need to be. Just so, we are clothed in Christ – He is our wedding garment. In fact, He is the One who clothes us according to his love and mercy for us. This is a tremendous gift which we should never presume upon or take for granted. Jesus is the One who makes us worthy to come to this wedding feast where we celebrate our union with Him, the Bridegroom of the Church to which we belong by virtue of our Baptism.

This is what it means to live as a baptized child of God. It is to be called and chosen to follow Jesus each and every day of our lives. Baptism is not simply a

stamp of approval that automatically gets us into heaven. When we are baptized, we become members of the Church, the beloved bride of Christ. In Baptism, we enter into a covenant with our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a covenant that must be lived, just like marriage, day by day, in faith and love and with as much godliness as we can muster!

This is way in which we live into our Baptism into Christ Jesus, our Lord, who now invites us to the feast. This is the feast of victory for our God! Come, one and all, eat and drink and rejoice, for Jesus is here for you and me. And to him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen