

“NO SHIRT NO SHOES NO SERVICE!”

Message for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

October 11, 2026

ISAIAH 25: 1-9 ☸ PHILIPPIANS 4: 1-9 ☸ MATTHEW 22: 1-14

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!

If you ever find a list of difficult stories from the Bible, there is a good chance the story of the wedding feast, especially Matthew's version, will be mentioned. There's a similar parable of Jesus found in Luke's Gospel, but Luke's version has little of the darkness and judgment found in Matthew's version. There have been many attempts by scholars to reconcile these two versions, but their differences are so telling, we might as well conclude that each is a faithful representation of a story that Jesus told at a different time and place. The parable of the royal wedding feast is one of a series told by Jesus to illuminate the scandalous assertion that tax collectors and harlots would go into the kingdom of God ahead of the respectable Pharisees. And remember the Pharisees, for the most part, were respectable.

If we find Christ's assertion shocking, it is because we share in the common assumption that human destiny is determined by human worth. The Pharisees, like most of us, would be quick to agree that “many are called, but few are chosen.” Naturally, because of their religious performance, they counted themselves among the ‘few.’ It's little wonder that they protested vigorously when they saw the crowd of improbable people whom Jesus gathered to himself as candidates for the kingdom.

When we consider this parable, we see first of all that just about everybody received a call. The call went first to “those who were invited,” to the Jews, the people chosen of God to make known his purposes among all the nations. But they were not found worthy. By the end of the parable, as we shall see, the servants were scouring the town to invite ‘as many as you find, both bad and good.’

Have you ever gone into a restaurant or a business and seen a sign that says ‘No shirt, no shoes, no service!’ If you're like me, I'm sure you have seen that sign at many businesses, usually it's restaurants, fancy ones at that, but the sign can be at

almost any business. Some signs say that you must have a coat and tie. If you are fortunate, they have loaners. I heard about one restaurant that promises to cut your tie off if you show up with one. There are black tie only events and establishments. Show up in the wrong attire and you will not get in no matter how much you may whine or attempt to bribe the person at the door.

You would never show up in a swimsuit to go snow skiing unless you were a member of the Polar Bear Club. It would be difficult to play center field in a football uniform. Show up in casual dress at a formal affair and you are mortified. Show up in a tux at a casual event and you feel overdressed and a bit stupid. Being properly dressed for the occasion is something we are all concerned about. Most people would never dream of showing up at a wedding naked, but some are going to show up at a wedding one day in clothing just as embarrassing as a birthday suit.

Our Gospel text opens with these words: Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.'

In the verses of our Gospel, the King not only prepared the feast, but He supplied a special garment for the guests. This was normally a long white robe. The guest need only request it from the ruler of the feast and it would be given to him. To show up without it was more than just bad taste; it was deemed worthy of punishment. To arrive without the garment was inexcusable. Therefore you can understand the anger of the King in the parable. He already had been snubbed by some and lost messengers to others. Now here is this person who did not find the occasion important enough to even obtain the proper clothing and yet shows up blatantly insulting the wedding party and the King. Is it any wonder that the King cast him out?

How like the Kingdom of Heaven this is. The King's Son will one day come back for His Bride and there will be a wedding feast. Many that have been invited will ignore the invitation for the things of this world. Others will mock and murder the messengers. Then there are those who thought all they needed to do was show up and it would be fine. They thought their own robes would be sufficient not realizing that their "Sunday best" were just rags of self-righteousness. They did not ask for the robe of righteousness that Jesus would have gladly provided. Their end will be just as disastrous as the first two groups of people. They will not be rejoicing at the feast but will be weeping and gnashing their teeth in outer

darkness. You see, while we are so cautious to be sure that we are wearing the right name brand clothing, we need to be sure that the right name is on our robe, Jesus. Anything else will not only be uncivilized, but will leave us unsaved and, forgive me for saying this, but also damned.

What robe will you be wearing when He returns for His Bride? Remember that many are called, but few are chosen because few ask the ruler of the feast for their free wedding garment. Jesus' righteousness; don't show up without it. You do not want to insult the Father or the wedding party. Seek Him now while he may be found!! To leave Him at the altar is your greatest loss!!!

It's time to set the record straight and decide what your answer will be. The place is here and the time is now. The King is waiting. Here's a question? If it was OK with the host of the party, would you invite a friend?

Inviting people to a party is a no-brainer if it's a great party. And that's exactly what God is asking us to do with our non-Christian friends. He's throwing a big party for His Son. You are invited. And you're invited to invite others, too!

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

Many people totally misunderstand what it's going to be like with God in the life to come. It's not going to be boring. God likes parties! He's throwing a party in honor of his Son. God is happy and proud of His Son. Remember when Jesus was baptized? The Father's voice came out of heaven and said, "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." The Father's pleasure continued when Jesus died and rose again to purchase His Bride, the Church, for Himself. One day, as it says in Revelation 19, there will be a marriage supper in heaven. The Father is so proud that He's going to throw a party to celebrate His Son's marriage to the Church - to all believers everywhere! Yes. There's a time for reverence and silence before God. But there will be lots of joy when God throws a party for His Son. Be there!

Everyone here has the incredible privilege and responsibility to invite your family and friends to that unimaginable party! If you do, one day, they'll walk up to you with a huge smile and a heart filled with gratitude and say, "Thanks. This is awesome!"

This story teaches us some important truths about inviting people to that party. First of all, when inviting people to the party, we will experience some rejection.

You'll encounter stubbornness. Look at v. 3: He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

His slaves are witnesses, people like you and me who are called, equipped, and qualified by God to invite our family members and friends to the party. But many people we know are unwilling. They're stubborn.

They were so proud of their own goodness and religious heritage that they saw no need of His grace.

It's the same today. Why won't our friends come to Christ? Often, it's self-righteousness, and religious pride. By nature, we think too highly of ourselves. That's why we tend to devalue Christ and His cross. This is why God by His power must break our stubbornness.

Invite people to the party and you'll know rejection in the form of stubbornness.

Others have been too busy to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.' But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,

Notice what these servants were to tell those who were invited. "Everything is ready."

We don't have to make ourselves ready for the party. We don't have to get busy trying to establish our own righteousness to earn our salvation and rewards from God. In fact, God's Word forbids this. It tells us that our salvation and everything that comes with it is already prepared and ready because Christ has done it all. He met every condition for our salvation. In fact, on the cross He said, "It is finished!" All we have to do is come.

But some don't come, do they? Many would rather chase after the things of this life. They are indifferent. The wedding is no big deal. The farm and business demand attention. These people were preoccupied with their profits. In other words, they were willing to give up the beauty, grandeur, and honor of being invited to this party for the sake of their everyday, mundane, self-serving lives. They were not concerned about the king's desires, but only about what they thought was in their own best interests.

That's the way it is with people today. They think, "How's that Jesus stuff going to help me in the here and now? I have kids to raise! I have a degree to earn! I have a business to run! I have a movie to watch! Don't bother me with an invitation to a party that isn't going to happen for a long, long time, if it's going to happen at all!"

The last portion of our text today says "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless."

This person was not a party crasher. He was one of the many who were invited. He came. However, he was not dressed appropriately; he wasn't wearing the right clothes!

You might be wondering, "How could the king expect these people from the highways and byways to come properly dressed? They had been rounded up from everywhere. Many had come from the streets. They wouldn't have had the clothes for a royal wedding." But think with me. The rest of the dinner guests were dressed in the right clothes. A possibility... the king himself had made provision for the wedding clothes.

History confirms it. In Christ's day, to enter into the presence of a king, you were sometimes supplied with the clothes from the king himself. People who wished to be in the King's presence were often required to wear a robe sent to him by the monarch. So, in this story, the wedding outfit was available to everyone.

We need forgiveness and a righteousness that isn't our own. He provides it. When Christ died on the cross, He took our sin, our rebellion, our dirt and gave us His holiness, His submission, His clean-ness.

This is a terrible picture. This man, clothed in the wrong garments, was tied up so tightly that he couldn't even offer any resistance. And then he was thrown into hell.

Our gospel lesson this morning is another parable in a series of parables that Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven. Remember the last two weeks, there was the parable about the father who had two sons, he asked one to go into the vineyard, but he said no but then changed his mind while he asked the other son and he said yes, but in fact did not go as he promised.

And then there was the parable about another vineyard where the renters did not want to give the fruit of the vineyard to the owner's servants. And the vineyard was taken from them and given to others.

Those two parables dealt with the kingdom of God! And this weeks parable also deals with the kingdom of God.

But what matters is that the king gave a banquet and the invitations to the chosen guests were rejected.

All the invited guests had excuses not to attend the banquet.

And a lot of those excuses made as little sense as the following:

There is an Arabian fable which tells about a man who went to his neighbor and asked to borrow a rope. "I can't lend it, because I am using it to tie up a pile of sand." his neighbor answered.

"But," the man came back, "you can't tie up a pile of sand with a rope."

To which his neighbor slyly replied, "Oh, yes you can.. In fact, you can do anything with a rope when you do not wish to lend it to your neighbor."

Excuses!! Excuses, excuses!!

And in this day and age, a lot of people have a hundred and one excuses not to be in the kingdom of God, too.

We come up with a lot of different excuses not to be in church on Sunday where the kingdom of God is evident on this earth. It is through the church, the body of Christ, that the kingdom of God comes. For Jesus says, where two or three are gathered in my name there will I be also.

In the Lutheran tradition, we start each worship service with the words, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen". We invoke the name of Christ so he will be present with us.

The invitation is given to all members to be present on Sunday to be part of the Kingdom of God. But sadly, we can come up with many excuses not to be present.

We are the invited guests and if we do not show up, the Kingdom of Heaven will be given to someone else. So please come each Sunday as the invited guests of the King, God himself, to be present in his kingdom.

As you look closely at this parable, there is a warning to the guests. A warning that one needs to be dressed appropriately.

All are invited, all attend, but those who stay are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ and the only way of salvation. We need to be robed in Him, it is as simple as that.

But I was invited, yes many are invited, but all must be dressed in the robe of righteousness.

Amen