

Matthew 22: 1-14  
RSVP  
OCTOBER 15, 2017

AS A PASTOR I'VE SEEN IT ALL AS FAR AS WEDDING'S GO. EVERYTHING FROM OVER THE TOP EXTRAVAGANZAS TO MODEST AND SIMPLE...WEDDING PARTIES THAT TAKE TEN MINUTES TO GET DOWN THE AISLE, BECAUSE THE COUPLE EITHER HAD SO MANY FRIENDS, OR THEY DIDN'T WANT TO EXCLUDE ANYONE THEY'VE EVER KNOWN – EVER, AND I'VE SEEN WEDDING PARTIES OF 2. I'VE SEEN FOOD FIT FOR A KING, AND I'VE SEEN FOOD MORE SUITED FOR A FAIRGROUND. I'VE SEEN BLUSHING BRIDES AND I'VE SEEN BRIDEZILLAS, I'VE SEEN ONE RUNAWAY BRIDE AND ONE JILTED BRIDE, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN A SCENARIO LIKE THE ONE PORTRAYED IN TODAY'S GOSPEL WHERE SOMEONE GETS BOOTED FROM THE WEDDING BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE PROPER WEDDING ATTIRE. WHAT IN THE WORLD?

TO UNDERSTAND OUR TEXT TODAY, WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING THE LAST FEW WEEKS IN OUR SCRIPTURES. JESUS HAS BEEN ADDRESSING THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS THROUGH PARABLES - FIRST THROUGH THE STORY OF THE FATHER AND TWO SONS, WHERE THE CHIEF PREISTS AND ELDERS WERE IDENTIFIED WITH THE SECOND SON WHO GAVE LIP SERVICE IN HIS INTENT TO OBEY, BUT THEN FAILED TO ACT ON HIS WORD. IT WAS THE SINNERS WHOM THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS ABHORRED – TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES, WHO THOUGH THEY INITIALLY OPPOSED GOD, REPENTED AND BELIEVED.

LAST WEEK'S PARABLE TOOK US TO A VINEYARD WITH WICKED TENANTS – AGAIN ASSOCIATED WITH THE PHARISEES, AND WHEN THE OWNER COMES TO COLLECT HIS FRUIT, THE TENANTS ARE WICKED, FIRST TO THE SERVANTS AND THEN TO THE LANDOWNERS OWN SON.

LAST WEEK'S PARABLE ENDED WITH THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS REACTION – “WHEN THEY HEARD HIS PARABLES THEY REALIZED HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT THEM. THEY WANTED TO ARREST HIM BUT THEY FEARED THE CROWDS.”

WHICH BRINGS US TO TODAY'S PARABLE WHICH BEGINS WITH “ONCE MORE HE SPOKE TO THEM IN PARABLES” – THE THEM BEING THE CHIEF PREISTS AND ELDERS...

SO, WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF A WEDDING INVITATION? SOME MIGHT SAY IT'S THE BEAUTIFUL DESIGN WHICH GIVES A HINT AS TO THE ACTUAL TYPE OF WEDDING TO OCCUR, OR THE CARD STOCK ON WHICH THE INVITE IS PRINTED. SOME MIGHT SAY THE SENTIMENT WHICH ANNOUNCES THE UPCOMING NUPTIALS OF THE LOVELY COUPLE. SOME MIGHT SAY A LOT CAN BE TOLD BY WHETHER IT'S DONE AT A BONAFIDE PRINTER OR ONE OF THOSE DO-IT-YOURSELF OUTFITS. IN REALITY, NONE OF THAT MATTERS AT ALL IF THERE ISN'T A MOST IMPORTANT ITEM ENCLOSED – AN RSVP CARD - RSVP - RESPONDEZ S'LL VOUS PLAIT – PLEASE RESPOND. IT ALL BOILS DOWN TO THE SAME THING – YOU NEED TO SEND IN THAT CARD IF YOU EXPECT TO GO TO THE PARTY AFTERWARDS. IF YOU EXPECT TO SEE YOUR NAME ON THE SEATING CHART AND HAVE A PLACE AT A TABLE.

**THIS** WAS THE PROBLEM WITH THE PHARISEES – THEY FAILED TO RESPOND TO JOHN'S INVITATION TO REPENT AND TURN FROM SIN, BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE SO SELF-RIGHTEOUS. IN FACT THEY KEPT DRAWING ATTENTION TO THEIR OWN SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. THEN WHEN JESUS CAME ON THE SCENE, THEY FAILED TO RESPOND TO HIM AND BY THE END OF THE TELLING OF THIS PARABLE "THEY WENT AND PLOTTED TO ENTRAP HIM IN WHAT HE SAID."

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RESPONSE. THE INVITATION TO GOD IS AS TO A WEDDING FEAST. BUT SOMEHOW WE HAVE LOST THAT FACT AND APPROACH OUR INVITATION AS A DUTY RATHER THAN AS A CELEBRATION. HIS INVITATION IS TO JOY. TO THINK OF CHRISTIANITY AS A GLOOMY GIVING UP OF EVERYTHING IS TO MISTAKE ITS WHOLE NATURE. IT IS TO JOY THAT WE ARE INVITED, AND IT IS JOY WE MISS IF WE REFUSE THE INVITATION.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RESPONSE. NOTICE THE THINGS WHICH MAKE THE ORIGINAL INVITEES NOT RESPOND TO THE INVITATION. THEY AREN'T BAD THINGS IN AND OF THEMSELVES – ONE WENT TO HIS ESTATE, ANOTHER TO HIS BUSINESS. THEY DIDN'T GO OFF ON WILD CAROUSING OR IMMORAL ADVENTURES. THEY WENT TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR PERSONAL BUSINESS.

IT'S SO EASY FOR US TO GET SO CAUGHT UP IN OUR BUSINESS, THAT WE FORGET ABOUT GOD'S BUSINESS. WE GET CAUGHT IN THE HERE AND NOW AND WE FORGET ABOUT ETERNITY. IT'S SO EASY TO GET LOST IN THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN THAT WE FORGET THE THINGS WHICH ARE UNSEEN.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RESPONSE. APPARENTLY WEDDING GUESTS THEN, AS TODAY HAD TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY.

JEWISH WEDDING CUSTOM HELD THAT THE FATHER OF THE GROOM WAS IN CHARGE OF THE EVENT AND BORE ALL THE EXPENSE ASSOCIATED WITH THE WEDING AND THE BANQUET THAT FOLLOWED.

IN THE CASE OF ROYALTY OR THE VERY WEALTHY, THIS OFTEN INCLUDED PROVIDING A SPECIALLY MADE GARMENT TO BE WORN OVER A GUEST'S REGULAR CLOTHING. THIS WEDDING GARMENT WAS PRESENTED TO THE GUEST UPON ARRIVAL AND DONNED IMMEDIATELY.

REFUSAL TO WEAR IT WAS AN INSULT TO THE FATHER OF THE GROOM AND COULD GET A GUEST EJECTED FROM THE FESTIVITIES. IN THE CASE OF LARGE GATHERINGS, IT ALSO SERVED AS IDENTIFICATION TO DISCOURAGE UNINVITED GUESTS FROM CRASHING THE PARTY.

IN THIS CASE, SINCE NEITHER ROYALTY NOR THE WEALTHY CAME, AND SINCE THE INDIVIDUAL WHO IS TOSSED IS ADDRESSED AS FRIEND AND THEN LEFT SPEECHLESS AFTER BEING CONFRONTED BY THE KING, WE CAN IMPLY THAT SUCH GARMENTS WERE MADE AVAILABLE BUT HE HAS DECLINED TO WEAR IT.

SO, IT'S NOT JUST ENOUGH TO SHOW UP, BUT TO DRESS ACCORDINGLY. WE DRESS WITH A GARMENT OF EXPECTATION – THAT WHEN WE COME TO WORSHIP, GOD IS INDEED PRESENT – THROUGH HIS WORD AND IN HIS SACRAMENT. WE CLOTHE OURSELVES IN HUMBLE PENITENCE, IT'S WHY WE BEGIN EVERY WORSHIP WITH AN ACT OF CONFESSION, SO THAT WE ARE IN A RIGHT SPIRIT TO HEAR GOD'S WORD AND COME TO HIS TABLE. WE DRESS IN THE FINEST ARRAY OF FAITH WE CAN MUSTER, TRUSTING THAT GOD'S PRESENCE WILL BE MADE KNOWN, THAT HE WILL SPEAK THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO MY OWN FRAIL HUMAN SPIRIT, THOSE WORDS I NEED TO SUSTAIN ME FOR THE WEEK AHEAD. WE DRESS IN A GARMENT OF HOLY REVERENCE, AS THIS IS GOD'S HOUSE WE ENTER AS WE PREPARE TO WORSHIP HIM.

WE COME NOT ONLY DRESSED, BUT READY FOR THE FEAST WHICH IS SET BEFORE US – WE COME PREPARED TO WORSHIP, STILLING OUR HEARTS AND OUR MINDS, LEAVING THE NOISE OF THE WORLD AT THE DOOR TO BE PICKED UP AS WE LEAVE. WE COME OFFERING IN FAITH ALL THAT WE ARE AND ALL THAT WE HAVE, KNOWING THAT THIS

HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US AS GIFT FROM OUR CREATOR IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND WE PLACE IT IN HIS CAPABLE HANDS IN JOY AND THANKSGIVING.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RESPONSE - WE ARE ALREADY CHILDREN OF GOD BY VIRTUE OF OUR BAPTISM. WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE IN RESPONSE AS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS WHOSE SIGN OF THE CROSS, MARKS US FOREVER.

THE WARNING OF THE PARABLE IS THAT IT ISN'T JUST ENOUGH TO SHOW UP. WE MAY THINK WE ARE DOING GOD A FAVOR BY COMING TO CHURCH, WHEN THE REALITY IS THAT HE HAS GRACED US BEYOND MEASURE BY EXTENDING AN INVITATION IN THE FIRST PLACE. SO, WHEN YOU COME, COME WITH ALL OF YOU. COME DRESSED TO PARTY. COME BEARING GIFTS WORTHY OF A KING, AND THEN ENTER WITH YOUR WHOLE SELF. AMEN.