

Matthew 22: 1-14

MY FIRST YEAR IN SEMINARY I HAD A CHURCH HISTORY PROFESSOR WHO WOULD SAY THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS THINGS. HE WAS FUNNY. HE WAS SARCASTIC. HE WAS ALWAYS CHALLENGING. YOU JUST NEVER KNEW WHAT TO EXPECT OR WHAT HE MIGHT SAY NEXT. AFTER A PARTICULARLY OUTRAGEOUS COMMENT HE WOULD LOOK AT US AND SAY, YOU KNOW I'M GIVEN TO HYPERBOLE, AND IF YOU QUOTE ME OUTSIDE OF CLASS I'LL CALL YOU A LIAR."

THAT WAS HIS WAY OF TELLING US TO NOT TAKE WHAT HE SAID LITERALLY BUT TO TAKE IT SERIOUSLY. THIS WAS HIS WAY OF GETTING US TO SEE A DEEPER TRUTH. I WONDER IF THAT'S WHAT JESUS IS DOING IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING.

HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED AN INVITATION TO A PARTY YOU REALLY DID NOT WANT TO ATTEND? WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT IT? I'LL BET YOU DID NOT MISTREAT, ABUSE, AND MURDER THE POSTMAN. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS IN TODAY'S PARABLE. MAYBE JESUS IS GIVEN TO HYPERBOLE. AN EXAGGERATED STATEMENT MADE FOR HIS LISTENERS TO SEE A DEEPER TRUTH.

HAVE YOU EVER INVITED PEOPLE TO YOUR PARTY WHO DID NOT ATTEND? YOU CLEANED, YOU COOKED, YOU DECORATED. THE TABLE WAS SET, THE FOOD PREPARED..EVERYTHING WAS READY BUT SOME OF YOUR GUESTS DIDN'T COME. DID IT MAKE YOU SO ANGRY THAT YOU KILLED THEM AND BURNED DOWN THEIR HOUSES? OF COURSE NOT, BUT THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS IN TODAY'S PARABLE. MAYBE JESUS IS GIVEN TO HYPERBOLE.

TODAY'S GOSPEL FINDS JESUS TELLING A PARABLE ABOUT THE PROTOCOL OF FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE IN ORDER TO MAKE A POINT ABOUT HOW PEOPLE IN EVERY CENTURY SHOULD RELATE TO GOD. ACCORDING TO THE PARABLE, A KING WHO WAS HOSTING A BANQUET SENT SERVANTS TO HAND DELIVER INVITATIONS TO EVERYONE THE KING WANTED TO HAVE IN ATTENDANCE. HOWEVER, INSTEAD OF COMING TO THE BANQUET AS THEY HAD SAID THEY WOULD, PEOPLE BEGAN MAKING EXCUSES FOR THEIR ABSENCES. THEY DECIDED TO TEND TO THEIR HOMES AND FIELDS OR TO GO ABOUT THEIR DAILY TASKS. THIS WAS A

SERIOUS BREACH OF ANCIENT PROTOCOL. PEOPLE WHO ACCEPT AN INVITATION TO THE KING'S TABLE ARE EXPECTED TO SHOW UP WHEN THE TIME FOR THE BANQUET HAS ARRIVED!

NO DOUBT, THIS IS A PARABLE OF JUDGMENT. SPEAKING ABOUT THE FIRST GROUP OF GUESTS THE KING SAYS, "THOSE INVITED WERE NOT WORTHY." BY IMPLICATION THOSE IN THE SECOND GROUP WERE WORTHY. WE TEND TO GET NERVOUS AND FEARFUL WHEN GOD BEGINS MAKING JUDGMENTS. IT LEAVES US WONDERING WHETHER WE ARE IN THE FIRST GROUP OR THE SECOND GROUP. ARE WE UNWORTHY OR ARE WE WORTHY?

WHAT SEPARATES OR DISTINGUISHES THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS FROM THE SECOND?

THE DIFFERENCE ISN'T THAT ONE IS MORE DESERVING THAN THE OTHER. THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS WERE THE RECIPIENTS OF THE KING'S INVITATION AND FAVOR. BUT SO WERE THE SECOND-INVITED GUESTS. AND SO WAS THE MAN WHO SHOWED UP WITHOUT A WEDDING ROBE. *THEY WERE ALL INVITED.* NONE OF THEM HAD ANYTHING TO EARN OR DESERVE AN INVITATION. IT WAS JUST GIVEN. IF THAT'S TRUE FOR THEM, IT'S TRUE FOR US.

THE DIFFERENCE ISN'T THAT THE KING LIKES ONE GROUP MORE THAN THE OTHER GROUP. HIS SOLE MOTIVATION IS TO SHARE HIS BANQUET. HE WANTS SOMEONE, ANYONE, EVERYONE, TO JOIN IN HIS JOY AND CELEBRATION, AND BE A PART OF HIS KINGDOM AND LIFE. BOTH GROUPS WERE GIVEN THE SAME OPPORTUNITY. IF THAT'S TRUE FOR THEM, IT'S TRUE FOR US.

THE DIFFERENCE ISN'T THAT SOME GUESTS ARE GOOD AND OTHERS ARE BAD. THERE IS NO DISTINCTION OR JUDGMENT MADE BASED UPON BEHAVIOR, BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, OR MORALS. TO THE CONTRARY, WITH THE SECOND ROUND OF INVITATIONS THE KING SENDS HIS SERVANTS INTO THE MAIN STREETS WITH THE INSTRUCTION TO "INVITE EVERYONE YOU FIND." AND THEY DID. THEY "WENT OUT INTO THE STREETS AND GATHERED ALL WHOM THEY FOUND, BOTH GOOD AND BAD." IF THAT'S TRUE FOR THEM, IT'S TRUE FOR US.

THAT'S PROBABLY NOT THE KIND OF SOCIAL LIFE MOST OF US LIVE, OFFER TO ANOTHER, OR RECEIVE FROM ANOTHER. BUT THE PARABLE IS TALKING ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM NOT

OURS. SO WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE WHO WERE NOT WORTHY AND THOSE WHO WERE?

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING THAT DISTINGUISHES THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS FROM THE SECOND-INVITED GUESTS. PRESENCE. THE SECOND-INVITED GUESTS SHOWED UP. THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS DID NOT. THE "WEDDING HALL WAS FILLED" WITH THE SECOND-INVITED GUESTS BUT THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS "WOULD NOT COME." THAT'S THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS.

THE KEY TO OUR LIFE IN CHRIST IS TO SHOW UP, TO BE PRESENT. THAT'S A LOT EASIER SAID THAN DONE. TO BE PRESENT...FULLY PRESENT..IS DIFFICULT WORK. THINK HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO BE FULLY PRESENT TO GOD, TO CHRIST, TO ANOTHER PERSON.

IT MEANS BRINGING AND OFFERING ALL THAT WE ARE AND ALL THAT WE HAVE TO CHRIST.

IT MEANS LETTING GO OF OUR OWN AGENDAS, DISTRACTIONS, FEARS AND CONTROL.

IT MEANS LISTENING TO WHAT CHRIST IS SAYING AND NOT JUST WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR.

IT MEANS BEING VULNERABLE TO CHRIST AND ENTRUSTING OUR LIVES TO HIM.

IT MEANS OPENING OURSELVES TO RECEIVE HIS LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION INTO OUR OWN.

IT MEANS SHOWING UP FOR OTHERS..FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN WHO ARE JUST AS WORTHY AS WE ARE. IT MEANS SEEING THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE AND NOT WHO WE WANT THEM TO BE OR THINK THEY SHOULD BE.

IF WE'RE NOT DOING THIS WITH CHRIST, IT PROBABLY MEANS WE'RE NOT DOING IT WITH OTHERS. INSTEAD, WE TOO OFTEN GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS, TO OUR WORK, TO OUR FAMILIES, TO OUR HOBBIES. WE'RE TOO BUSY, TOO TIRED, TOO DISTRACTED BY LIFE. THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO BE DONE AND MONEY TO BE MADE. WE CONVINCED OURSELVES WE HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO AND BETTER PLACES TO BE. THAT'S WHAT THE FIRST GROUP DID. WHAT THEY DID NOT REALIZE AND WHAT WE SOMETIMES DO NOT REALIZE, IS THAT THERE IS NO LIFE OUTSIDE THE BANQUET, THE KINGDOM.

TO SHOW UP AND BE PRESENT IS TO BE WORTHY BEFORE GOD. IT'S THAT SIMPLE AND IT'S THAT DIFFICULT. WE DON'T EARN OR PROVE OUR WORTHINESS AS A PREREQUISITE TO ENTERING THE BANQUET. WE SHOW UP, BE PRESENT, AND DISCOVER FOR OURSELVES THE WORTHINESS GOD HAS ALWAYS KNOWN ABOUT US. THAT'S WHEN OUR LIVES BEGIN TO CHANGE. WHEN WE SHOW UP TO THE BANQUET.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE GUY WHO SHOWED UP WITHOUT A WEDDING ROBE? COULD THIS BE MORE THAN JUST A DRESS CODE VIOLATION? WHAT ELSE WAS MISSING? "HE WAS SPEECHLESS." IT WAS AS IF HE WASN'T REALLY THERE. JESUS IS REMINDING US THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE SHOW UP BUT WE'RE NOT REALLY PRESENT. OUR BODY IS THERE BUT WE'VE LEFT THE ROOM.

HERE'S WHAT I WONDER. WHAT IF THIS MAN HAD SAID SOMETHING, ANYTHING? WHAT IF HE HAD JUST MADE HIS PRESENCE KNOWN TO THE KING? WHAT IF HE HAD SAID: I WAS HUNGRY. I SMELLED THE FOOD. I TRUSTED YOU TO FEED ME.

I WAS LONELY. I SAW LIGHTS ON. I TRUSTED YOU TO TAKE ME IN.

I WAS THIRSTY. I KNEW THERE WOULD BE WINE. I TRUSTED YOU TO GIVE ME A DRINK.

I WAS NAKED. I KNEW PEOPLE WOULD BE WELL DRESSED. I TRUSTED YOU TO CLOTHE ME.

I WAS SAD AND GRIEVING. I HEARD MUSIC AND LAUGHTER. I TRUSTED YOU TO SHARE YOUR JOY.

I WAS EMPTY. I SAW ABUNDANCE. I TRUSTED YOU TO FILL ME.

I WAS DYING. I SAW THE DOOR WAS OPEN. I TRUSTED YOU TO GIVE ME LIFE.

WHAT IF HE HAD SAID ANY ONE OF THOSE THINGS LIKE THAT? IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH. HE WOULD HAVE SHOWN UP WITH ALL THAT HE WAS AND ALL THAT HE HAD. HE WOULD'VE BEEN PRESENT. THEN THE KING WOULD HAVE SAID TO HIM, "OH MY DEAR FRIEND, I'M SO GLAD YOU RECEIVED MY INVITATION. I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE."

CHRIST EXTENDS THE SAME INVITATION TO EACH OF US. AND JUST LIKE THE FIRST-INVITED GUESTS, WE ARE BUSY AREN'T WE. NO TIME FOR OURSELVES....MUCH LESS TIME TO PRAY.

CAN WE LAY ASIDE OUR BUSINESS THIS MORNING AND HEAR CHRIST EXTEND THE INVITATION AGAIN? MANY OF US ACCEPTED THE INVITATION YEARS AGO, YET HAVEN'T REALLY BEEN FULLY PRESENT. MANY HAVE NEVER ACCEPTED THE INVITATION. CAN WE TRUST CHRIST TO TAKE US IN? TO SHARE OUR JOY? TO FILL US? TO ENTER OUR PAIN AND GUIDE US? TO GIVE US LIFE? CAN WE GIVE UP OUR CONTROL AND NEED TO BE THE BOSS OF OUR LIVES...MAKING OUR OWN PLANS AND DOING ALL THE THINGS WE WANT? CAN WE SURRENDER TO THE GRACIOUS INVITATION, WILLING TO BE FOREVER CHANGED AND LOVED? FREED TO EXPERIENCE NEW LIFE IN HIM?

REMEMBER, IF IT WAS TRUE FOR THE GUESTS IN THE PARABLE, IT'S TRUE FOR US. AMEN.