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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia, IL
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Unexpected Guests are Welcomed to the Wedding Feast of God's Son

Matthew 22:1-14

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To all who are called saints; grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew 22:1-14

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ² "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³ and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴ Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." ' ⁵ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶ And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. ⁷ But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' ¹⁰ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

¹⁴ "For many are called, but few are chosen."

This is God speaking to us.

We pray, O Lord, as we hear Your Word, bring your kingdom to us, that we may be compelled into your gracious service and into the service of those whom you are calling. Amen.

In the name of Him to whom we belong, dear elect of God, chosen in Christ Jesus and precious in God's sight,

It was week to remember; a feast for the ages. The King is holding a 7-day wedding celebration for the marriage of His Son and it is a feast you will never forget. The hall is filled with voices and laughter and joy; packed from wall to wall, from end to end with faces and feasting and family. The smell of good things are wafting throughout the banquet hall. It was a feast you will never forget.

But the way it all worked out was so unusual; the whole process was unexpected. The people who you expected to come didn't; and the people you never expected to see were there.

This is what the reign of God is like: unforgettable and unusual. In our parable today, Jesus directs us to expect the unexpected as we see who it is that is welcomed to the wedding feast of God's Son.

It was a long time in the making. The wedding preparations went on for century upon century; all the while, God was planning, prepping, and presenting the perfect platter. He spared no expense, the very best: a feast of fat things, only the best cut, the oxen and the fatted calves, the well-aged wines; he spared no expense. All things were ready, but no one seemed to be coming.

He sends out his servants: "Here is the guest list. Go to these addresses; the King is summoning them. Tell them to come." These were the ones you would expect to be there. This who's who of the guest list for God's kingdom.

This was God's chosen people. His dear children whom he has led out of Egypt ... into the promised land ... he drove out the nations before them and laid before them a platter of promises. He sent his prophets, like Isaiah, telling him to write:

Isaiah 25:6-9 And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

But it fell on deaf ears and would not fill their hungry bellies. They could not wait. They would not wait. It was too long a thing, to distant and they had things to deal with on their plate now. They wanted something more palpable; something they could

taste, something they could smell, something they could touch – so they feasted on sin; they ate, they drank, and they celebrated it. But they did not wait. They were not willing to be sustained by His prophecies.

And it falls on deaf ears and hungry bellies today. And sometimes those ears and bellies are our own.

It falls on the deaf ears of a Christian who want something more palpable than this parable. He lay on that surgical bed, waiting, but he was tired of waiting. For years heart disease had threatened his life. For years he had been waiting for doctors to find a solution; to tell him he could go back to a normal lifestyle and resume a normal diet. He was tired of waiting; exercising; popping pills; doctors and diets; surgeries and suffering. When will God take this illness away? He doesn't tell his pastor what is going on. He wants something more palpable than this parable.

There are times when God's word seems too distant, too far away; we have trials on our plate now. Our bellies want something we can taste, smell, touch; and that platter of promises seems so far away. So the devil lures us with another platter, telling us: "Go on – eat, drink, and celebrate, for tomorrow you die!"

But listen, God is calling. All things are ready. He is opening the doors to the wedding hall and the smell of good things are wafting out into the Church and into the world today. So it says in Revelation 22, "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'"

So He sends another group of servants: "Here is the guest list. Tell them that all things are ready; come to the wedding."

All things were ready, but no one seems to care. They've got too much on the plate already. One says, "I've got to attend to my farm." Another, "I've got some gardening work to get caught up on." One says, "I've got business to attend to." Another, "I've got some shopping to get caught up on." They say, "We've got guests coming over for lunch." ... "Our kids have a soccer match." ... "What has church ever done for me?"

And not only are there those who aren't interested, there are some who show outright resistance. They refuse the invitation and even begin seizing the servants, they abuse them, they murder them.

The religious leaders, most privileged to the Word, are looking for something a little more palpable. They resent the sort of reign that Jesus brings. They are looking for a

reign of heaven that is closer to earth, that will bring earthly power, earthly satisfactions.

So what happens? This joyous occasion has been turned into an occasion for war. Do they realize that the very servant who has come to them is the King's own Son? They've crucified the King's Son. And the King will not stand for this. His reign brings vengeance against all who resist its gracious invitation. And He destroys all that they have, all that they consider precious, He burns up their city and counts them unworthy of His grace.

Matthew's narrative could also be called a "narrow" – tive. Throughout his narrative, Matthew's Gospel is like a river banks that keep narrowing and narrowing; the flow becomes more and more restricted; Jesus keeps journey onward toward God's purpose, and the closer he gets to Jerusalem the more the resistance intensifies.

It narrows ... from Galilee to Judea to Jerusalem ... the conflict with the religious leaders is building, building; they are looking for a way to seize Him ... narrowing, narrowing ... our sins are building, building...

The mission of Christ narrows and narrows until all of our sins have so restricted and resisted God's reign – our unwillingness to come, our indifference to God's word, our hostility to repentance – building, building until it culminates in the cross. It narrows and narrows in focus until there is nothing left for it but to burst forth into something new. It climaxes in the death of God's Son for our sins and bursts forth into something new – He rises; He lives. In the resurrection, the reign of heaven is victorious and extends itself beyond boundaries to the most unexpected of guests.

But listen, God is calling. All things are ready. He is opening the doors to the wedding hall and the smell of good things are wafting out into the Church and into the world today. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'"

So He sends his servants again, this time without restriction: "Go into the highways and as many as you find, invite them to the wedding."

The word for "highway" in v.9 is difficult to translate. It literally means: "through the out-way." It is a word used to speak of a narrow stream which narrows and narrows until it suddenly breaks forth into a lake or sea. When used of to speak of a road or street, it means the road which leads out of the city, beyond the border. It is the "out-way" which breaks forth from the city boundaries into open country. "Go through the

out-way," He says. Unexpected guests are welcomed to the wedding feast of God's Son.

And so they are sent. The apostles go "through the out-way," beyond the boundaries of Israel, beyond their comfort zone. They go to Jews scattered abroad; they go to Gentiles, to the outcasts and sinners; as many as can be found, both evil and good bring them in. Whether they appear to you to be good people or evil people, it makes no difference; they will all look the same once they are seated. The reign of God shows no partiality; It makes all who are chosen look the same; they all are wearing the garment He gives.

And so you are sent through the "out-way." He sends you through the out-way with an open invitation to an unexpected guest. Whom do you find in your life? Whom do you find that is beyond your comfort zone?

They will not all respond the same. Be prepared. Some will be unwilling: caught up indulging in something sinful that they just can't let go; some indifferent: busy with work, busy with big changes in their life; some will be hostile: resisting the invitation, challenging your faith, persecuting you and murdering Jesus with twisted words.

"For many are called, but few are chosen." We do not do the choosing. We are merely servants, extending the invitation onward. We cannot choose who is good, who is evil, who deserves the invite, who does not; "Whether good or bad" – all we can do is invite.

God says, go through the out-way. Go onward and outward with My kingdom. The banks of our mission have opened wide; beyond our comfort zone; beyond boundaries; to as many as we find. Beyond your comfort zone – go to the people that you would not expect to see at God's wedding celebration.

Go to the fellow Christian who has been having health problems and is tired of waiting and say, "Come to the feast."

Go to the fellow Christians who seem to have lost touch with the church, and say, "Come."

Go beyond boundaries to friends, neighbors, family, co-workers ... nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, low-income communities ... as many as you find. But just be sure to give them the garment. – For once clothed with Christ, there are no outsiders, there is no one who looks different, all are one in Him. Go through the out-way.

But don't forget to give them a wedding garment. They must have a garment. When the King finds someone trying to sneak in without a garment, he will not stand for it. When God finds someone trying to sneak in clothed only with their old works of righteousness, He notices. And so the man is speechless. He c-c-cannot respond or d-d-defend himself; he looks old; he has worn his old clothes, his old works, his old status; he relies on his old church membership; his old church attendance; and is left clothed with nothing at all. He has tried to sneak in without faith in Christ.

You must have a garment and you do. You have a garment; you are clothed with Christ's righteousness; you are clothed in baptism:

Galatians 3:27–28 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So listen, God is calling. All things are ready. He is opening the doors to the wedding hall and the smell of good things are wafting out into the Church and into the world today. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'"

It was a week to remember; a feast for the ages. It was a 7-day feast that lasted forever. You look around and see the wedding hall is packed from wall to wall; voices and laughter fill the room; faces and family and feasting. You look around and what do you see? Who are those faces you see?

Well look around you. What do you see? You see a church filled with faces. Sure it doesn't look like wall to wall seating, maybe it looks rather scattered, maybe it looks rather ragged. Maybe there are some unexpected faces – but the reign of heaven is beyond the boundaries of what we see. It brings us the garments of Christ, so that in the kingdom of heaven, we all look the same – there is no difference. We are all clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Smell the good things wafting into the Church today and let those smells, that platter of promises waft out with you into the world and into your life – For here, in Word and Sacrament, God gives us to taste of something new, something eternal – he gives us Christ and His resurrection – a taste of the new creation; a vision of a place where death and sickness and sorrow and sin no longer reign, for it has all been swallowed up in Christ.

Isaiah 25:6–9 And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined

wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

His kingdom is unforgettable and unusual. Unexpected guests are welcomed to the wedding's feast of God's Son. And there you've found a feast you will never forget.