

**October 15, 2017 - Staying in Fashion**

Given by Pastor Mattei

*‘For many are called, but few are chosen.’* (Matthew 22:14)

Did you show up with your wedding robe on today?

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus tells his followers a troubling parable about the kingdom of heaven. A king invites some guests to attend a banquet. Those invited don’t really care about the invitation; in fact, most of them kill some of his slaves; others ignore the invitation altogether and go about their business. The king then responds in kind and destroys those whom he first invited. Then he tells his servants to invite everyone that they can find to fill the wedding hall with guests. These guests probably never imagined that they would be invited to such an event. The king’s behavior is rather extravagant and generous. He is set on having a grand time and does not spare the cost. In fact, he first has the animals slaughtered and the meal prepared, then he invites guests. Later on he invites just about anybody.

But there’s a warning in the final section of the parable. One guest doesn’t appear to have it “right.” He’s not wearing the proper clothes at the wedding banquet. When he is asked why, he has no response and is cast out of the party. Jesus concludes the parable with this, “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” The privilege of being called to the party cannot be taken lightly: free grace is not the same as cheap grace.

The parable is troubling. On the one hand, it might leave us with a sense of anxiety. Our most hidden fears might surface and we may be tempted to ask ourselves if we’re loving enough to be accepted by God, if we are worthy of the sacrifice of Christ, if we have the right understanding of our faith, or even if we’re praying the right prayers: in other words, if we are wearing the right clothes. On the other hand, the parable does show us about God’s grace. The invitation is now for everyone. Still, you’d best know who the party is for and dress appropriately. What are you here for? Whom are you here for? Are you wearing the right attitude? Are you celebrating Jesus in your life? Are you tasting his love for you?

Paul gives us a hint in his letter to the Philippians (4:1-9) of what it means to wear the right attitude: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone... Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

We are all called to be in the presence of God and enjoy life abundant. Does our attitude and way of life witness to to the fact that we have fully accepted the invitation? Are we extending to others the same grace, kindness and mercy we have been offered? Have we put on Christ? To put on the wedding robe provided by the king is to take on the garment of Christ; when we come to the wedding feast, we are clothed like everyone else in mercy. If we refuse this mercy by instead relying on our own judgmental metric of performance, social arrangements, or religious acceptance, we stand in judgement. As Paul reminds us, those who wish to be judged under the law will face the consequences.

Jesus’ statement that “Many are called but few are chosen.” prods us to consider that the invitation is extended to all, no exception and no need to go through religious and moral loops. God reaches out to all and is not selective in his love. In a world so willing to throw blame and shame around, this can be good news indeed.