

Sermon for Pentecost 23A  
Sunday, October 15, 2017  
“If you RSVP to the wedding banquet,  
you have to wear the wedding garment.”

Text: Matthew 22:1-14

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you remember what it was like being in high school? I remember a time when I worried about what I was going to wear, how I was going to look, what people were going to say about me. More importantly, I worried about whether or not I was part of the “in” crowd or not. Not that I don’t think about all those things still, but fitting in and belonging are a really big deal when one is 16. People gravitate to the folks who will accept them and let them be a part of their clique. People do whatever it takes so they get to be a part of the latest “in” crowd. That feeling never really goes away for most of us. Here in New York City, they talk about the A-list—that’s the folks that hobnob with celebrities, get invited to those red-carpet events we see on TV or read about in People Magazine. We want to be a part of a “special ‘in’ group”; if you think it that’s not the case, just look at how politicians solicit votes and win elections.

Today’s gospel reminds me of the human inclination to be a part of some “in” crowd, in a way. A king gave a wedding banquet for his son, and he invited all of the A-list crowd. Now I don’t know what was wrong with this king; if I got invited to some king’s banquet, I’d clear my whole calendar to try to go! But this king must not have been a well-liked king, because the A-list crowd felt they had better things to do, and they turned him down. No, they didn’t just turn him down, they did him wrong, even to the point of mistreating his slaves and killing them. I suppose his consequent outrage and his reaction by sending troops to destroy and burn their cities is an indication of what a horrible tyrant he must have been. So, then he told the rest of his slaves to invite the masses, the common folk, who were apparently so excited to be invited to the wedding banquet of the king—and they accepted his invitation. But this parable ends in a twist. One of the guests came in jeans and a t-shirt. That was unacceptable, and so he was thrown into the outer darkness where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.

Of course, this parable has a deeper meaning. In the sequence of events according to Matthew, Jesus told this parable following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and after he turned over the tables in the Temple, so the political and religious leaders—the status quo—were enraged with Jesus and were beginning to plot to kill him. Jesus was foreshadowing things to come, and by the time this Gospel was written, around the year 80 CE, Matthew had an important message to tell the young Christian community. This parable is an allegory: The king is God the Father, and the son who is being honored at the banquet is Jesus Christ, who “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Israel was given an invitation to the kingdom, but when the time actually came for the kingdom to appear, they refused to believe it. Many prophets, including John the Baptist, had been murdered. The king’s reprisal against the murderers could be interpreted to represent the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the Romans in the year 70. But Matthew reminded them that “many are called, but few are chosen.”

What does this mean for us that many are called, but few are chosen? This parable tells us that a seat at the king’s wedding banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven requires something more than merely accepting an invitation to discipleship. It’s not enough to RSVP and then just show up. We can’t simply call ourselves Christians and sit passively in the pews. We have to have some skin in the game. We have to put our money where our mouth is when we call ourselves Christians. While this gospel passage offers several messages for today’s Christians, this particular message speaks to us here in particular as we begin our stewardship campaign today. It’s not enough to RSVP to the wedding banquet and then just show up. We have to put our money where our mouth is.

Now there are three things that I’d like to say about stewardship. First, stewardship isn’t just about balancing a budget. God put us in charge of a lot of things, in fact, according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Genesis, he entrusted us to the care of his creation. We’re supposed to take care of the things he has given us: our bodies, our families and loved ones, our environment, and even the material things he has given us. All Saints Church is a worshiping community and we are all part of that community. It is one of the many things that God has blessed us with to be an integral

part of our lives, our spiritual and our personal journeys. He has invited us to his heavenly banquet, which we celebrate in the Most Holy Eucharist and we share in the sacramental and devotional life here. But, it isn't enough to RSVP to the banquet and then simply show up. Now don't get me wrong; showing up is important, but after we show up, we have to take hold of the baton and continue the race. Part of the race is the care of the worshiping community, so that it will be here for us.

But we spend a lot of time in stewardship campaigns talking about balancing budgets when stewardship involves so much more than that. God has blessed us with a community and extension of our families. God has also blessed each of us with gifts and talents. Some of you may be thinking, "I don't have any special talents or gifts." But, I assure you, you do. What are the things that interest you? What are you passionate about? At a previous parish where I served, there was a woman who liked to make patchwork quilts. That doesn't seem like much, but she turned that passion into a ministry in which she and several other people learned how to sew prayer quilts which would be given to others who had specific prayer concerns. It doesn't matter who you are, you have passions; your gifts and talents flow from those passions. We have to take care of each other, and we thank God for the gifts and passions he gives us by giving back to his honor and glory. Join a ministry or start a new one. I guarantee that there is at least one other person who will be interested along with you...if that person isn't currently a member, maybe a visitor seeking a spiritual place to belong will keep coming back because your ministry has resonated with him or her and they've been inspired. We have to take care of this community that God has given us so that we can continue our ministry and mission to the community, this city, and the world. I had to miss a convention this week of the Society of Catholic Priests in Chicago, but I heard that one of the speakers there, Bishop Eugene Sutton of the Diocese of Maryland said something to the effect that nobody is going to come to our church if the preaching, the liturgy, or the music is bad. And yesterday at the Altar Guild meeting, someone mentioned that a recent visitor or newcomer marveled at how beautiful our church and our worship is and said she was coming back. We can't expect anyone to want to be a part of this community if we don't take pride in it ourselves. We are a catholic parish within the Anglican Communion in the Diocese of Long Island. That means that we embrace

the best of our heritage of the church universal—reaching back to the earliest centuries of Christian tradition—in an expression that reflects our heritage in English church tradition (a tradition that also celebrates oneness in diversity), and as such we are a shining light in this diocese. We have also begun a partnership with our sisters and brothers of the Lutheran Church, another expression of the body of Christ, in a move to live out the unity of Christ’s one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. As we figure out what that means for us, we will need your many gifts, talents, passions, and resources to make it a visible and vibrant reality.

The second thing I want to say about stewardship is that it *does* require faithful use of our financial resources. We can’t do ministry or mission without money. That’s just a fact. We live in a capitalist society and we live in New York City. It ain’t cheap. Every aspect of living out the mission of All Saints takes money; we have to acquire all of the things necessary to make the Eucharist happen: the wafers, the wine, the lights and the heat to have masses, the compensation of the priest to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It takes resources to fund all of the wonderful ministries we have here so we can show our oneness in diversity and our respect for each other. And it takes money to support our outreach into the community. How much? Only 10%. We call that the tithe. Now if you don’t like that word, that’s too bad. I didn’t make that up; it’s in the Bible. Leviticus 27:30 says, “Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord.” And Hebrews 7:5 says, “Now the Law commands the sons of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people (that is, their brothers [and sisters]).” We are expected to give a tenth of what we receive from God’s blessing back to him for the care of the temple. The theme of this year’s stewardship campaign is “Give generously of the little that you have, and the Lord will reward with abundance.” Read the scripture passage my letter that you will receive after mass; it is about Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath. She offered a portion of her flour and dedicated cakes to God and she and her family never went hungry. Tithing is an act of faith and trust in God; when we show God that we trust him, he will never let us go wanting.

The last thing I want to say about stewardship is that withholding your resources because you don’t like something or someone is *not* good stewardship. When you do that, you make it about *you*. And it never has

been and never will be about *you*. It is about God and the care of God's people. When you withhold what you owe God, you hurt the whole community in here and out there. When you withhold your resources from God's church, you short change God's people. If you're going to come to the wedding banquet, you need to wear the wedding garment. If you're gonna call yourself a member of All Saints, you make a commitment to the mission and ministry of this place. Now if that doesn't work for you, there are plenty of other churches, Christian expressions, or other faiths that you can try out. God is bigger than you or me or All Saints Church and he will receive you with open arms wherever you are, but if you're going to come to God's heavenly banquet as we express it here at All Saints, you must support it fully, joyfully, and faithfully through your time, your talent, and your treasure. You can't RSVP to the wedding and just come; you have to wear the wedding garment.

Later on you will receive pledge forms where you can declare how you will support the mission of All Saints. Please, please, please fill it out and turn it in on November 19, the final Sunday of our campaign. Make a declaration of faith as to how you can guarantee that All Saints' mission will continue, I don't mean just now, but in the future as well. Pray about how you will give your support for the coming year, but think about the future as well—how we can grow our ministries to continue ministry for years to come, how we can expand our ministry to better witness to each other and the world, how you can be faithful stewards of this place to guarantee that we can do what we do for generations to come. Let us love each other in faithfulness. And, above all, trust God. Trust God. Trust God. Amen.

#### Resources

Karoline Lewis, "What not to wear" in *The Working Preacher*, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4980>.

"What is the meaning of the Parable of the Wedding Feast?", <https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-wedding-feast.html>.