

101523 Sermon, "The Called and the Chosen"

You may have noticed that when I begin my sermons, I often start with a funny story. One of our church members shared with me this about funny church signs that a friend of hers in South Carolina had sent to her. I enjoyed it. Hope you enjoy them too!

God didn't create anything without a purpose, but mosquitoes come close.

Don't give up! Moses was once a basket case!

Adam and Eve, the first people to not read the Apple terms and conditions.

What happens in Vegas is forgiven here!

What do you think? Not only are these fun, but I shared them with you because they provide a connection to think about in relation to today's sermon.

Today's passage from Matthew 22 is called the parable of the wedding feast. Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is open to everyone, not only Jews. In order to better understand today's passage, we need to look at the big picture leading up to this passage.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, many people shouted "Hosanna!" which means "save us now". It is a cry for help or deliverance, often directed toward God. The Jews at that time would have hoped that Jesus would defeat the Romans and become king. Yet, Jesus' concern was about cleansing the temple and dying on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. After cleansing the temple, Jesus warned that the Father's house of prayer would not turn into a den of robbers. Enraged, Jewish leaders questioned the authority of Jesus.

Jesus told the parable of two sons. When told to work at the vineyard, the first son disobeyed after agreeing to work, and the second son repented and

obeyed after refusing to work at first. The first son symbolizes the religious leaders at that moment, and the second son symbolizes the tax collectors and prostitutes who were considered sinners at the time.

And then there is the parable of the evil servants. Even though the owner entrusted the vineyard to the workers, they refused to honor those sent by the owner and even beat them and killed them. Although they were the stewards, they were greedy as though the vineyard was their own. When the owner sent his only son, they still did not repent and killed the son, thinking that the vineyard would be their possession once the son dies. Right before today's passage is the passage where it says that God would entrust His vineyard to those who bear fruit.

Then comes the parable of the wedding feast. Do you see the big picture now? While continuing the theme from earlier, Jesus focuses on new people when sharing this parable. There is no denying that the Kingdom of God has begun with the Israelites. But new people appear. In His ministry, Jesus repeatedly talked about God's kingdom; today's passage says that the Kingdom of God is like inviting people to the wedding feast of His Son.

The king who hosted the wedding feast refers to God. The original guests invited were the Jews. The Jews believed that because they were God's chosen people that was all that was required to enter the Kingdom of God. The king sent out a whole bunch of invitations to people, but a lot of them said no. They refused his invitation and rejected going to the special feast. The reasons the people give for not going are that they think it won't be fun, they think it's not important, and they are planning to do other things instead: "To their field," "to their business." Because they were busy with their own works, they did not join the feast of the king.

Not only that, they ridiculed and killed the messengers of the king. The Jews

who ignored the servants were those who ignored the prophets who came to deliver the message of God. The Jews who reacted violently could be a reference to those who mistreated and murdered the prophets and messengers of God. Ultimately, King sent his troops to judge them.

Then, the king sent out his servants into the streets and invited anyone and everyone to his feast and the wedding feast was filled with all the people, both good and bad. The guests who were invited afterwards are the Gentiles. This parable shows that the Kingdom of God is open to everyone, not just the Jews.

Jesus made it known that God's blessing and salvation will extend from the boundary of Israelites to all people in the world. Isaiah 25:6 prophesied: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine- the best of meats and the finest of wines." It's talking about the king's feast in today's passage in Matthew.

But here is a problem! Although everyone was brought to the feast, one needs to wear a wedding robe to enter it. The king asked a person who did not wear the wedding robe, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" He might have come simply out of curiosity when he was invited, but he had to wear the wedding robe before the feast began. Because we are not familiar with their culture, we may think that it is heartless to kick the guests out for not wearing wedding robes. But according to the custom, wearing a wedding robe was a gesture of respect when attending a wedding feast. Moreover, this was the feast hosted by the king!

Charles Spurgeon commented on this verse:

"He came because he was invited, but he came only in appearance. The banquet was intended to honor the King's Son, but this man meant nothing of the kind; he was willing to eat the good things set before him, but in his

heart there was no love either for the King or his well-beloved Son.”

What does this mean for us? This parable was an explanation of how God invites us to become part of his heavenly family. God wants everyone to attend the “feast” in heaven. And you don’t have to do anything special to do it! All that is required is to accept the free gift of salvation. Our “robe” is the blood of Jesus. As long as we recognize His sacrificial death and what it means for us, our lives can be transformed and renewed.

Free from Sin

President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. The moment it went into effect on January 1, 1863, every slave living in the Confederacy was legally free. But until they knew of their freedom, the legal fact had no impact on their lives. In fact, Union soldiers carried hundreds of thousands of copies of the proclamation and passed them out as they made their way through the South during the war. Christ has set us free from power of sin and death. We must recognize that fact and live like it.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, because of Jesus, we are all invited to participate in God’s grace. Anyone can believe and receive new life. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and called us righteous. We can also spread the word and invite others to join God's family. The Gospel is a wonderful gift for everyone! Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.