

Matthew 2: 1-14 Come As You Are

When I read today's gospel I immediately realized that it was a parable. The first thing that is why Jesus told this particular parable to the Pharisees, chief priests and elders. God had given the Moses the law and had expected the Jews to follow it. Over the years they had corrupted the law with systems of injustice and exploitation. God expected justice and righteousness but the Pharisees and priests and elders had brought oppression and despair. These men saw Jesus as a threat to their power, their status and their income. They understood that this parable was about them and they reacted violently to Jesus who was threatening their status quo. Their anger at the possibility of losing everything brought Jesus to the cross.

Remember that in a parable, everything that is mentioned symbolizes something else. In our reading today here is what I found. The king who sends out the invitations is God. The son who was just married is Jesus. That was easy. Now the more difficult parts. The people who were invited but didn't come were the Jews who did not recognize Jesus as the messiah and who God eventually sent 2

into slavery into Babylon. And the servants that were beaten and killed were the prophets that God had sent to the Jews all through the Old Testament. And their ultimate rejection of God's gracious invitation is embodied in Jesus. The ultimate rejection is the crucifixion. This parable is about making a decision on either accepting the invitation from God or rejecting the invitation. And ultimately the consequences of the decision.

Now the king, God, tells his servants to go out into the streets and alleys and to invite everyone – the poor, the sick, the tax collectors, the good and the bad.

There are expectations of the guests and their behavior at the marriage feast but the main thing is the graciousness of the invitation. It is a sweepingly gracious invitation given to both the bad and the good. The Jews, remember, rejected God's invitation. Refusing God's invitation is a serious matter.

God called everyone to the feast. We are here today because we have heard God's invitation. But there are consequences to accepting the invitation and that

consequence is discipleship. When we accept Jesus, we accept the fact that discipleship is expected of us. We are to do all that is within us by whatever spiritual gifts that have been given to us to become “Doers”. I remember a song from Sunday School – be ye doers of the word and not hearers only. To accept the call of Jesus is to accept a life of doing. The people who came to the feast and had on new clothes represents those who had accepted the message of Jesus and were willing to accept a life of discipleship. Scripture says that when we accept Jesus we are made new, given new spiritual clothes like the people at the wedding. We are willing to pattern our lives after the teaching of Jesus. We become doers.

My first thought was that the man who was tossed out because he had no new clothes wasn't logical. Where would a poor man, maybe a homeless man get the money to buy new clothes? But his lack of new clothes represents his unwillingness to accept discipleship. The man believes in Jesus but doesn't want to get his hands dirty. He wants the reward of heaven but does not want to help those who are in need of help. So he was tossed out of the wedding feast.

4

There is a story about a pastor who began his sermon by saying to his congregation that if they felt their life was fine and if they felt their kids were loving and obedient and if they didn't have any addictive behavior and their work was fulfilling that could skip the church service and leave. The pastor went on to say that his sermon would be addressed to people in need and only to people in need. No one left.

After the service there was a woman who was a recovering alcoholic. She said to the pastor that for the first time in her life it really became clear to her that church is to be for people like her. That every time she went to church she felt inadequate. That she would look around at the people and think how perfect their lives and families seemed. She looked around and saw the people smiling and seemed so content. She felt she shouldn't be there. But it dawned on her that day because of that sermon that she was one for whom Jesus paid the price and offered the gift.

The truth is no matter how good we look on any given Sunday we don't deserve to be here. If we are honest with ourselves we know we don't measure up.

The confession in the Lutheran Church starts like this. I confess that I am in bondage to sin and cannot free myself. That I have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done and by what I have left undone. But by the grace of God and his gracious invitation, here we are. Loved, forgiven and accepted. We understand the church is a hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints.

The main thing for all of us is God's invitation. We are here in this space because we have been invited. We don't have to wait until we are perfect. God sees our scars and our scabs. God sees our fears and our doubts. And God invites us anyway. We have accepted the good news of the risen Christ. And by accepting that good news we each have been commissioned to act as disciples – to reach out into the world to the good as well as the bad – to tell the good news to others – in words and in our actions.

The good news of the Gospel is that we – the good and the bad – have been invited by Jesus to come into the kingdom of God. We can do nothing by our own merits to be in the kingdom, so he graciously invites us, despite our flaws.

6

We are here by virtue of his merit, not ours. We are here by the inviting grace of God. Our choices matter whether we take a step in the wrong direction or when we fail to take a step in in the right direction. There are times when we fail to step up and respond to the invitation when it is given. But by God's grace, we are given a chance every day to say yes when the invitation comes our way. God knows our fears and doubts. God knows our weaknesses and still he invites us every day. So to everyone today and every day God says - Welcome to the feast.

Amen

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Guest Speaker

