

“Come to the feast!” Mt 22:1-14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

We have lost the content of the Biblical message in more than one way. Today we’ll speak about one particular misconception. About Jesus. So often we err thinking about Jesus as this soft, nice person who wouldn’t say a harsh word.

He just wants us to be nice people, and He would never allow anything bad happen with us. If only we have read the Gospels, we can see that this is not an accurate picture of Jesus.

Who cleansed the temple from all money changers and merchants? Alone! Jesus. Who publicly went after Pharisees saying ‘Woe, to you!’ Jesus. Who vividly describes what is going to happen with those who do not repent and do not turn from their sins? Jesus.

We can trust Jesus, when He warns us. For this is the very reason He came – to rescue us, each of you, from eternal death, when all evil will be destroyed. This is why He sent His disciples all over the world, that’s why He sends us - to save as many as possible from the destruction.

Today we read one of Jesus parables, and it’s tone is anything, but soft and nice. There are a few things I need to mentioned before we begun to look at this parable. It is consensus among Biblical scholars, that this parable was not simply about a general truth. Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees and addressed very

specific issues. Their rejection of Jesus and the coming destruction of Jerusalem. So we can say that this parable was addressed specifically to those Jesus listeners.

However, these questions which Jesus addresses in this parable are as relevant today as they were at that time and we will talk about them in a minute. I just need to say that this message is to a great extent addressed not to you, but to those who are not present in the Lord's house. I'll repeat it. ...

Thus I will have to rely on you, that you will bring this message to those our brothers and sisters, whose love and trust to the Lord have cooled down. Who have lost their way and are in risk of losing their lives.

Now, let's look at this parable. **"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come."**

This is one of reoccurring themes in the Bible. The Kingdom of God is like a great feast. Abundant feast where invited guests can enjoy the riches of the Lord's hospitality. Jesus speaks about a particular feast, given for King's own Son.

There is something to know about feasts in Jesus time, it will help to make sense of this parable. They didn't have fridges. It means that once the food was prepared there was no way back, they had to consume it, they couldn't preserve it.

It determined the customs for inviting guests. First, invitations were made. They were made as we call it with RSVP. A response was required, so that a host could know clearly how many will come and how much food to prepare.

It means that when Jesus speaks in this parable about sending servants to call those who were invited, He refers to those who already had said that they will come. They already had committed. But now they wouldn't come.

"Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'"

All this situation is so unusual. It is impossible to imagine it happening. The King invited the guests. They said 'yes', and thus far it makes sense. If you were invited to the wedding of a king's son. Of course you would say 'yes'.

This is such an honour! How important would it be? How could one possibly say 'no'!? What message would you send by refusing to keep your promise? That you don't care, that you dare to ignore your king. As I said it is almost impossible to image this happening.

But then, we can see how unusual this King is. He had prepared the wedding feast. Just think for how many it was prepared if He had slaughtered many oxen and fat calves?

He had called those who were invited. They refused to come. Then He sent other servants to call them once again. He closed His eyes to their rejection. He patiently and kindly asked them again. ‘Come, come!’

Think about it, we, Christians, we all are invited into the King’s Son’s wedding feast. He has given us invitations in our Baptism. We have said ‘yes’ through our parents, ‘yes, we are coming’.

We have said in our Confirmation: “Yes, I promise, to listen to your Word and to receive your sacrament.” But then, how do so many respond today? Not much different than the guests in this parable.

“But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.”

That’s it. They paid no attention and went off. What were their reasons to pay no attention? Ridiculous. It is difficult to make sense. Let me just go through few things and then we can try to make sense of them.

Feasts were not something that would happen often those days. Meat wasn’t a part of daily meals, it was reserved of special occasions. Everyone was looking forward to celebrations like this one.

The food that was prepared for this feast was truly royal and abundant. Who would want to miss it? Besides, that was a communal event, where the King, on whom they all depended, invited them. Wonderful reason for joy and celebration!

Try to put all these together, - rich feast, community celebration, kindness of their King, previous commitment.. and then suddenly - this total apathy. What were reasons the guests refused to come?

Farm, business, daily chores, some of them where even as hostile as treating the King’s servants shamefully and even killing them. Doesn’t make much sense. Refusing to receive countless blessings? Why?

This parable serves as a fitting parallel for our situation. Triune God has worked to grant us salvation, to rescue us from death. Jesus has invited us to His eternal banquet, to the heavenly feast for His chosen people.

The Holy Spirit invites us into His community of saints with whom we are going to rejoice in eternity, yes, with those around us. God the Father offers countless

blessing that He has prepared for us. And every Christian has made the previous commitment to be at the Lord's feast, when we were baptized and confirmed.

But then... No attention. Even hostility. How can we explain it? How to make sense of it? It is not a rational behaviour. It is a behaviour that is driven our rebellious hearts.

We don't want to be under someone's authority. Even if, in fact, we depend on this person every minute of our lives. We are ready to say 'no' to God's grace and blessings so that only we can live like gods ourselves. This isn't a reasonable choice.

It is a sinners' rebellion against their Creator. 'We will have control over our lives, and over our time, we are going to do only what we want.' And the Lord is patient. Very patient. Incredibly patient. He waits, and calls, forgives, and calls ...

He sends us to be His messengers, to deliver His invitation. But His offer has an expiry date. And this is scary. **"The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."**

This is what Jesus told the chief priests and the Pharisees. He prophesies the end of Jerusalem. I guess they didn't believe. They probably thought that God is supposed to be a nice guy, that He is never going to harm anyone.

It is amazing. We can read in the Old Testament so many prophecies being fulfilled. How many times God said that if nations will not repent and turn from their evil ways, they will be destroyed. It seems that no one believed them, but nevertheless these prophecies came to fulfilment.

The same way Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and they didn't believe. The same way Jesus warnings apply to our society. Repent and believe! And what kind of ideas do we have about Jesus, about the Triune God?

We erase from the Bible all these scary words and then try to make Jesus into someone who has to deliver whatever we desire. He owes to us to care for us, to forgive us, to bless us for we... we are such a nice people.

Then he [the King] said to his servants, **'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'** And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests."

Nice people? Many of those who are called but now neglect the Lord may indeed be nice people in their own eyes, or even in eyes of their neighbours. But the fact remains, and this is decisive –

... they pay no attention to the Lord on whose grace they depend, now daily and especially at the end of times. They chose to reject their Creator and Redeemer and to listen to themselves, even if they have promised something else.

But, as the King said, the feast is ready. Bring in all you can find. Here Jesus was speaking about us. When the leaders of Israel rejected Christ's invitation, it was extended to all nations. To good and bad.

We are these good and bad. To be a nice person is not a prerequisite to be invited in Christ's feast. We are not here because we are nice people. No. We are here because the Lord who invited us is this gracious God.

Think about it, He comes to us, He searches for you. He doesn't pick nice people to invite to His feast. He pick us as we us. With all our depravity and brokenness. With all our sins and shameful desires. With our past and present.

He knows us, and He has the power to make us new. To purify us from all our sins. To give us eternal life. To recreate us into something far more beautiful than we can even imagine. He can and He longs to do it.

There is only one requirement – do not reject His invitation. Receive His gifts, His love and care! Let Him come to you, be with you, care for you and bless you. Let Him bring you into His eternal Kingdom. Come and receive!

The Son of God took so much pain to deal with us. Remember the big picture. Creation. All is very good. Then because of our first parents sin and death came into the world. Instead of wiping us all out, God the Creator became one of us.

To redeem you, to save you from destruction. He sent His disciples, today He sends us with the same message. Come to the feast, everything is prepared! Accept my invitation, be saved, come into my presence!

But, "many are called, but few are chosen." This is such a privilege to be here, today, in God's house, knowing that we are not here because we are good, but because God has chosen us. Each of you. He has accepted you as His children.

It is such a privilege to trust the Lord, knowing that we don't do it on our own, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. That the Lord is as close to us as He could be. Right here. That all that He does, He does for you.

Rejoice and share this message with others. We want to have this feast as well attended as possible, with all our loved ones, already here and then in eternity, and by God's grace and the help of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible.

Amen.