

## **“About those attitudes...” Matthew 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.””**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

On our menu today we have one more of these delicious parables of Jesus. While reflecting on this one I realized something – one more reason for Jesus to speak to us in parables, and that is – we are blind to see what our attitudes and actions look like from God’s perspective. We can see them much better when looking at others.

This parable is a prime example of this reality. We could say that this parable reveals to us two attitudes – that of our God and our own. Let’s see what is going on in this parable, how it helps us to see our attitudes and action more clearly.

The king sends out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast of his son. This is not the first time when those people hear the invitation. Not at all. The common practice was to invite people to such significant events well in advance, and to get confirmation from those who committed to come, so that the host could plan how much space and food and drink would be needed.

What it means is that all those people to whom the servants went out to call them, they were not only invited, but they had also promised that, yes, they will come to the wedding feast. Now they simply ignored the king.

He sends others servants, and the things get worse. Many keep ignoring them, but others go on and treat them shamefully and kill them. Does it make sense? Can you relate to the actions of those invited guests, who now had changed their minds?

This parable doesn't depict a regular or real situation from 1<sup>st</sup> century's context. Not at all. What is going on just doesn't add up. The king was planning this feast. Not some government official with a little influence. The king...

Most certainly he had much power, if not absolute power over his subjects. They depended on him and on his favour. They relied on his care and his protection. How could anyone dare to ignore Him?! Besides, as we can see, he was a good king.

He was very kind and generous towards his subject. He wanted them to enjoy his goodness and to share with them his joys. That wasn't just any meal, that was the wedding feast for the king's son. For the heir of his throne. For the future king.

How honoured anyone should be to be invited to the king's son's wedding feast! That was such a privilege extended to those guests. The king was patient. He sent his servants once, and even when the guests disrespected him, once again. He wasn't arrogant or proud, or quick in his anger. On his part he did as much as possible.

But the invited guests... how could you even make sense of what they did? This is where this parable helps us to see ourselves, for Jesus isn't really speaking about imaginary guests, but about those very real people, whom God the Father invites to join in the feast that He is serving us here.

How many have been invited? And how many have promised to commit? How many times have you heard the words: "I promise to regularly listen to the Word of God, to receive the Sacrament, and to participate in the ministry of this congregation, to bring my children to the Services in God's house..." and so on. Where are those many invited guests? Where are they?

When we listen to this parable, we see clearly how incredibly arrogant and foolish those invited guests were, but we don't see that often we are not much different. How could anyone ignore the call of the One to whom all authority is given in heavens and on earth, on whose favour hinges our lives here, and especially in the life to come! How could anyone ignore Him after we have made our promises!

This parable reveals the scary power and the depth of our sinfulness. In our foolish blindness we exchange our loyalty to the Triune God to loyalties to His good gifts. In such incredible folly we believe that it is more important to attend to God's good gifts, than to pay attention to the Giver, who gently calls us to Himself.

Why didn't the invited guest come? For there was something in their lives, that they believed was more significant, more urgent and more deserving their attention than the Triune God. What were those things? Something very familiar.

What do people today say, why do they betray their promises made before the congregation? What hinders them to come when God the Father and Jesus their Redeemer calls them? The same things that for those in the parable. "I need to work, I can't come." We can understand... "I have my business to attend, no one else can

do that for me, first things first.” Sure... Or as Luke adds to this parable: “You know, I need to spend some quality time with my family.” All these are good things. Work. Business. Family. All are good gifts of our generous God. But what have we done?! We have made them our gods. We have replaced the true God with His good gifts.

Of course, we don't think about it that way, but that is what many have practically done. Assigned to these good things the ultimate significance. And once they been made more important than the true God, they have huge power over us. It is not just a work anymore, or just a business, or just family, they become much more.

It is our God (or false gods) who give us our identity, bestow upon us true significance, fill our lives with meaning and purpose, grant us security. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit desires to do that, that is why He says: “I am your God.”

This is why He elevates us so much. He not only sets us over His creation to continue His work, to be His co-workers exercising caring dominion over this whole planet, but He also adopts us into His family and embraces us as His own beloved children.

The Trinity welcomes you. The Father reveals His wonderful design for our lives, He fill us not only with His wisdom, but also with His own Spirit. Jesus promises to always be with us, to care for us, to protect us and to bring us to our eternal home, to be with Him forever. That is His attitude to us. This is what kind of God He is.

But if false gods take the place of the true God, then we begin to expect those wonderful gifts from them, or we should say – from created things... from our economic activities, or relationships. “My achievements will make a name for me.”

“My relationships will grant me ultimate joy and happiness. My activities will fill my life with meaning and security.” Etc. Then there is no more time for that King, from whom we have received everything, ourselves including, and who is the only one who actually can and desires to fulfill all our deepest human longings.

So, we ignore Him, that's our attitude, or something worse, we treat His messengers shamelessly, rejecting, mocking, and pushing them away. And why not – for nothing bad is happening? At least, not immediately. What should anyone fear?

Our Father is slow to anger, true, but then the time comes when the cup of His patience is full and the just judgment is poured over those who betray and reject Him. Remember the Flood! No one believed it may happen. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah! They were flourishing and everything was getting better and better.

Remember Jerusalem in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and Babylonian exile! Now remember the words of Jesus is this parable! “The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” O, Jesus wouldn't do such thing!

O, yes, but He did! In 70AD Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, burned it to the ground and symbolically went through the city with the plough from one end to the other. Exactly as Jesus foretold. God's wrath is a real thing, as is His judgment, as

is His incredible grace. He will deal with those who betray Him, there is no doubt about that. For now, however, it is still the time of His grace, and He still keep sending His servants, that is – us, all of us, again and again. For He has no pleasure to see His invited guests perish, He is not giving up on anyone. Not yet...

He will wait as long as possible, giving second and third and tenth and hundredth chances and hopefully, the invited guests will eventually come around. Let us pray that we too could play our part in their homecoming!

Nevertheless, God won't let anyone to ruin the wedding feast of His Son with His beautiful bride the Church. That is His priority. So, what did the king do? "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."

Those invited were not worthy... This is important for us to understand. Those were not the worthiest among the people who were invited. It was the invitation of the king, that make the invited guests worthy. Their rejection made them unworthy.

We are here now. Not because we were so worthy that our God had to choose to invite us. No, let's not flatter ourselves! His invitation made us worthy, and the fact that by His grace we accepted His kind invitation. This is why we are here.

Because our God the Father is gracious and kind, because He isn't looking for some special people, He invites good and bad, just like us, and the only condition to be able to enjoy everything that He has prepared for His chosen people – is to come with the right mindset, to come to Him empty handed, as beggars.

This is how most commentators have understood the wedding garment. When we respond to our Father's invitation, we don't come showing off our shiny accomplishments and clothed in our good works. We come closed with Christ's righteousness, with Baptismal water, with Christ's blood, and filled with His Spirit.

And because we have this wonderful wedding garment, our Father looks at us with immense joy and affection: "You are my beloved child! With you I am well pleased! Come and join the feast!" This is what He says to us, this is what He says to you.

So, don't worry about your goodness or lack of it, don't stress about your failures and shortcomings, you are not here to be evaluated, you are here as worthy guests of honour, responding to the Father's invitation, beautifully dressed in Jesus' holiness, and fully prepared to receive and enjoy the favour of the Triune God.

Empty handed, humble, but having everything. Let's feast!

Amen.