



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “THE WEDDING CRASHER”

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 32:1-14; Mathew 22:1-14

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, September 20, 2020 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Mathew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

One of the unfortunate aspects of COVID-19 is that a number of couples had to postpone their weddings; though, I should add that some couples managed to find some very creative ways to make that special day possible– that blessed service of worship. Over the years, I have been fortunate to preside over any number of weddings, and some of them have been beautifully simple and intimate gatherings while others have been as grand and elaborate as we might imagine. I have found, however, that, regardless of the size of the wedding party or the number of those in attendance, there is always a measure of planning and preparation that goes on behind the scenes.

Just a few days after I proposed to Martha Ann, I received a message on my home answering machine. The message basically said this: the church is available and is now booked; next week the florist and the photographer could meet with us, and tomorrow morning you’re invited to

join me and my mom as we go look for china at Belk's. Of course, it didn't happen that fast...but it felt like that!

For months the preparations were ongoing, and, eventually, it came time to send out the invitations, and we were kind of relieved when those first few RSVP's came back to us. We were surprised to see that some the people whom we had invited as a matter of common courtesy were actually coming. Conversely, some of the people that we would have expected to be there, had other commitments. And I get it, many of us have been in that situation before. We receive a wedding invitation in the mail and we are asked to respond. And sometimes the answer is a quick and easy "yes." We don't even have to check our calendars, because we know that it doesn't matter if something else has been scheduled...we're gonna be there! Other times, it may be a matter of figuring out logistics. We get back to the person but it takes a few moments. I mean, there's a lot to think about – like packing up the family perhaps or having help to get us to the airport. Who's going to check our mail or watch the dog or water our plants? Now, for some weddings –we just have to think about it a little bit longer...and so the invitation languishes under that refrigerator magnet as the idea of attending the wedding marinates in our consciousness.

In our New Testament Lesson this morning we are presented with a parable about a wedding, but not just any wedding, for this wedding has been compared to the kingdom of heaven. And, we need to keep in mind that, in its original context, this parable highlights for us the rejection of Jesus by the Scribes and the Pharisees, those individuals who had been given the invitation to attend the wedding, but who had chosen instead to disregard the invitation.

Now, a more universal application of this parable is realized when we consider also that, like the Gentiles before us, we too have been invited to come. And, praise be to God, as any living faith attest, we have made our arrangements to attend; we have denied ourselves and our plans; we have affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God, and we have committed, each in our own way, to making the journey – to actually attending the wedding! In other words, we have chosen to respond with our presence rather than to push the invitation to the far side of life's desk until a more convenient time. And so that's that...that's basically the heart of the parable, right? We might as well just wrap up the sermon right here, take up the offering, sing the Doxology and go home.

But, before we do, tell me, what in the world are we supposed to do with this wedding crasher? What are we supposed to do with that person we're introduced to in verse 11? The king has entered the hall, surveyed his surroundings and his guests, but something is not right...the king notices that amidst the crowd someone who isn't wearing a wedding robe.

So let's consider that reality for a moment...we are told that the servants of the King had gone out into the streets and gathered everyone they could find – the good, the bad, and everyone in between – gathered them so that the wedding hall was filled with guests, and this man was among them. But he is not wearing a robe! I wonder if he even had a robe, quite frankly! To be honest, this parable is really not about clothes at all, is it? You see, this is a parable about heaven and about God and about God's people...and what a diverse group of people were present!

Frederick Buechner reimagines this parable in an unforgettable way. "The string ensemble strikes up the overture to 'The Bartered Bride,' the champagne glasses are filled, the baked duck

is passed around, and then they sit by candlelight with their canes...their orthopedic shoes...their aluminum walkers. A woman with a harelip makes a toast.” The point Buechner is making is that this was not at all the kind of crowd we would expect to be at the King’s banquet, but they are there, and they are there because of the love and the grace and the invitation of the King.

In this way, I suppose our wedding crasher does deserve some credit. After all, he did take time out of his schedule to be there. He understood that it was important to say “Yes” to the king. Perhaps he heard through the grapevine about what had happened to the other folks who had disregarded the invitation. Maybe he just felt like it was the right thing to do. Whatever his rationale, he did it – he was there. But something’s wrong. And the King picks right up on it. “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” The man in our parable is speechless. There’s nothing he can say. “Bind him hand and foot,” the King says, “and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now, that strikes me as a pretty serious dress code violation, don’t you think? “Throw him out where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth?” This is coming from the Jesus who has also said, “Don’t worry about your life, what you eat, what you drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” And yet, here in this morning’s parable the absence of a wedding robe results in eternal damnation. Now, here again, I don’t think it has anything to do with a literal robe; indeed, God looks far beyond what we wear. In fact, God looks to the very heart of who we are! And that, I believe, is the important distinction that is being made here!

Barbara Brown Taylor put it well when she said that the mistake this man made was not that he showed up in shorts, but that he showed up short on righteousness and he thought no one would notice, least of all the King. Dr. Elton Richards has described this as the turning point in the parable, because, while it seems that some people have taken the invitation lightly by not coming and staying away, this man took the invitation lightly once he was there. You see, God’s gracious invitation always comes to us as we are, but that does not mean that we can come to the banquet that way. Grace is free, but it’s not cheap! It involves change – it involves repentance.

I wonder how much we resemble him, the wedding crasher that is...the one who believes that an invitation alone is enough; the one who believes that because of God’s grace we can go on living as we have always been living. I find myself wondering, after we receive the blessed invitation, why do we come to God’s banquet of grace? Is it for the food? Is it for the fellowship? Is it so that we can see and be seen? Is it because we love mission trips? Is it because we like to work with Habitat for Humanity sites, which incidentally, Tina’s house we’ve been working on building is being dedicated this coming Sunday? Is it because we like to be encouraged? Or do we come to the wedding to honor the son?

Friends, we cannot come to this banquet spiritually unshaven and disheveled, unfocused and unrepentant, and expect to go unnoticed by the King. As we enter the hall, we must check our pride at the door, our self-righteousness...our presumptions. We must put on that figurative wedding robe, that reverent and attentive spirit, that new way of life and living. And don’t you know that we should also come with great joy, especially considering that none of us are worthy to receive an invitation in the first place! Not one!

For all of the talk about judgment and Armageddon, isn't it wonderful that this is the illustration that Jesus chose to share with us, which describes the essence of eternity, a wedding banquet...an occasion of festivity and rejoicing? And for those whose lives have been changed forever, for those who understand that the past is finished and gone, and that with Jesus Christ our life is fresh and new -- for those who look and act and feel differently than they did before they received that invitation...theirs is the kingdom of heaven!!!

At the end of the day, we need look no further than ourselves to find that appropriate wedding robe. For it is made from the fabric of our lives; and know this, if the fabric is old and tattered, if it bears witness to a life that remains as it has always been, then we will stand out for all of the wrong reasons. But, if upon receiving God's gracious invitation, we come to that banquet, and if the fabric of our lives is made from the love and hope and joy and peace of our Savior, then that will be our heavenly banquet of grace for the expanse of eternity!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.