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"Party"

Exodus 32:1-20 Matthew 22:1-14 Philippians 4:1-9

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 32:1-20

Last week we heard the first 10 commandments that God gave the people. This morning we hear how in one party they manage to break almost all of them. Indeed, when Moses comes down from the mountain and sees what they are doing they drive him to LITERALLY break the ten commandments. Hear the word of God from Exodus 32:1-14

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 22:1-14

Every wedding has its own unique flavor. One of the most interesting ones I presided over was for a dear friend who I'd known for 27 years. She was widowed for 40 years. Her intended had been a widower for a year. She and her intended once announced to a group of friends, "We're 67 years old and we're madly in love." At the wedding her husband to be was escorted down the aisle by his two daughters. He called them his groomsmen. The bride had her 30 something daughter be her matron of honor and she was escorted down the aisle by her two 40 something sons. She called them her bridesmen. I said to the bridesmen, "I'm afraid that for you it will be always a bridesman, never a bride!

In this morning's gospel lesson, Jesus tells another pointed parable- this one about a wedding party, God's Party. Hear the word of God from Matthew 22:1-14.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we are humbled that we've been invited to be a part of your party. We have responded and want to be a part of inviting others. Your kingdom not full, there are still places at the table waiting to be taken. Speak to us about the part you have for us to play in that. Amen.

There once was a family that moved into the neighborhood of a little country church. The little country church decided to reach out to the family. When they arrived at the doorstep the members of the church were surprised to find that the family had 12 kids and were for the most part poor. They extended an invitation to the family to attend their services and said goodbye. Later that week the church responded to their need. They delivered a package to the family and said, "We want you to know that you and your entire family are welcome at our church anytime. We have bought you these gifts and we want you to feel comfortable and at ease in our congregation. We hope you can use these," and they left. The family opened the package to find 14 suits of clothing, beautiful clothes for every member of the family.

Sunday came and the congregation waited for the family, and they waited. The family never showed. Wondering what could have possibly happened, after lunch the members of the church returned to the home and found the family just getting back, all dressed in their new clothes.

"We don't mean to be nosey but we would like to know what happened. We had hoped to see you this morning in church," the pastor of the church inquired.

The father spoke up. He said, "Well, we got up this morning intending to come. And we sure do appreciate your invitation. But after we showered, and got dressed, why we looked so proper we went to the Episcopal Church."

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who was giving a wedding banquet for his son. You've all been to wedding receptions and you know how they can get out of hand. Imagine one thrown by a king for his son. Invitations are sent to all the friends of the family but they all turn down the invitation and some of them mistreat and even kill those that were sent to invite them.

When John Kennedy was president of the United States, he invited a number of accomplished artists to a White House banquet. Among those invited was the then aging William Faulkner. Faulkner turned down the invitation, saying, "I'm too old to make new friends."

According to this morning's parable of Jesus the Lord God, creator, sustainer, ruler of the universe has given and continues to give an open invitation to people to come and feast with him at a banquet table. God wants to get to know us. God offers to sit down and eat with us at table. God wants to have FELLOWSHIP with the likes of us!

How do we respond to this kind of invitation? Certainly an invitation to sit down with God and to become acquainted personally far outweighs an opportunity to do so with anyone else. Yet according to the text, that's just what happened. Those invited said, "Excuse me, please. I cannot come."

People have not changed much in the years that separate the first telling of this parable and its telling today. The invitations are still going out, and the excuses are still coming in."

Have you ever heard this excuse? "Someday I'll give my life to the Lord, but first let me have a little fun." Those folks assume that God is some kind of celestial killjoy. Yet, Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Paul's letter to the Philippians charged them to REJOICE in the Lord. How long? Always! Jesus didn't come to take the life out of the party. He came to put life in the party.

There was a woman in Atlanta that threw a wedding party for herself. Kathleen Gooley was all set for her wedding, had given the caterer a non-refundable deposit for the reception, but she suddenly found herself without a groom. The wedding, of course, was cancelled. But what would they do with all that food? It had already been paid for and prepared. Since she was out the money for the caterer so she contacted shelters for the homeless and drug rehabilitation centers to compile her new guest list. The Atlanta Constitution reported that by bus they brought street people to the country club, where

they sampled fresh crab and lobster, and steamed baby carrots well into the night. She figured someone should enjoy the banquet!

The first message of this parable is everyone is invited to God's party.

The second message is that we are to be aware that not everyone will respond to the invitation. This is being reenacted everyday in the lives of people and in the life of the church. The great enemy of faith and salvation even to this day is preoccupation. God is simply crowded out. It's not that people disbelieve in God, or despise God. They simply have no time for Him. They are just too busy. They are tired. Other matters are pressing. Heaven can wait. All are invited but not all will respond, but there is a third and final point. In the end the king chooses who can stay.

When some refused to accept the kings' invitation like the jilted bride in Atlanta, God invites everyone out on the streets and in the marketplaces. The dining hall is filled with guests but there is a problem. It just so happens that as the king is mixing and mingling with the guests, he sees a man who is not wearing the appropriate wedding attire. "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe," the king asks. The man was speechless, so the king had him bound and tossed into a place called outer darkness. Jesus concludes the parable with these solemn words: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

This part of the parable is hard for us to understand. If you are inviting street people to come to a fancy banquet you can't throw them out because they don't have the best clothes in town! But what we need to know is that in Jewish culture, when a father threw a wedding banquet, if those he invited did not have proper clothing it was the responsibility of the host to provide such. Tuxes for all! The king threw the man out of the party because the man who came to the wedding in shabby clothes didn't bother to put on the proper clothes that the host had provided.

I believe Jesus was warning us that we must be properly prepared. We are to respect the invitation not only by responding, but by responding with respect and the honor due the one who extends such a gracious invitation and accept God's provision for us. Notice also that it is the king himself who does the bouncing. The king alone determines who is in and who is out, not us. Our task is to respond to the invitation, make an effort to be there and enjoy the banquet. And to invite others.

There are some who can't come to God's party because they physically can't do it. But there is another aspect we need to consider. Those of us who have accepted God's invitation can not only invite others to join us, but we can take the party to those who can't come.

They are folks who can't come to church. There are folks who can come but so far haven't yet. We can be like the servants in the parable that go to those who weren't on the A-list.

The writer Drew Duke recalled from her childhood her second grade Valentine's Day party. Several days earlier a big decorated box had been placed at the front of the room

by the teacher. It had a slit in the top. Each student had been invited to bring valentines addressed to friends and to drop them into the box. Then on Valentine's Day, one student was designated by the teacher as the postman to distribute the cards. Earlier that week Drew's mother had bought a package of 35 valentine cards. Drew asked her, "Why did you buy so many?" She replied, "So you can give one to each person in your class." "No ma'am," Drew said, "We don't do it that way. We only give cards to our special friends. I only need four cards. I don't even like some of the people in my class." Her mother said nothing else. Drew signed four cards and put the names on the front.

Everybody was excited when the Valentine's Party began. The girl designated as postman began calling the names and handing out the cards. Some very popular children got bunches of cards. Drew heard her name called quite often and was having a wonderful time. But then she became aware that the little girl sitting in front of her had received no cards. Her head was drooping lower and lower. Then suddenly the postman called this little girl's name and delivered to her one valentine. Her face lit up like morning sunshine. She tore open that valentine, hurrying to see who had cared enough to send it. Drew looked over her shoulder and saw that it was signed "Your secret admirer." The little girl smiled and glanced around the room, wondering who it could be. "But", said Drew, "I knew who it was but I didn't tell. I recognized my mother's handwriting." Her mother had obtained a class roster and had sent a card to every child in the class.

There are people like that little girl that need to know that they have a Not-So-Secret admirer in Jesus. They are waiting for us to send them a card a letter an email, a phone call, a flyer, an engraved invitation to a Men's breakfast this coming Saturday, and Friends of Faith at the Martin's that same night. They need an invitation to Nurtured Heart Approach workshop which starts next Sunday from 4-6 pm. We have flyers on the table in the Welcome Center.

I'm excited for you for next Sunday. I will be on study leave so we have a special treat. I will be on study leave. ☺ Instead, Mike Wilson will be sharing some of his insights from the gospel lesson for the day....but also we will have 5 testimonies from some of our new members who responded to their invitation. Myrna Dunnam, Raphael Melendez, Alice Thompson, David Benard, and Tonnia Crenshaw will be sharing what it has meant to them to become a part of our church family.

God's party will happen and the table will be filled. We don't have control over how people will respond to our invitations. We only have control over our responsibility to keep inviting. and keep inviting and keep inviting and keep inviting in hopes of reaching our goal of having 100 new additions to our church family for our 100th birthday in 2022.

If some choose to give, "No" for an answer we are to keep inviting until the table is filled and the Kingdom is filled. Our job is to keep inviting EVEN IF some of those we invite and even provide good church clothes wind up going to the Episcopal church! ☺ Because as we celebrated on World Communion Sunday, it's not our table that we are filling...it's God's Table, it's God's banquet. It's God's... party.

Let's pray. Gracious God, whose banquet table, prepared for our enjoyment, offers all the best that life can hold, grant us in these moments we spend together such a taste of your bounty that we will be eager every day to meet you in prayer, meditation and study of the Scriptures, and be confident of finding you in our relationships and in all we do that our lives may honor you and bring joy to others.