

Typically when I read this parable I focus on the people in the streets, the good and the bad. They usually to represent the church, right? Different people all gathered together randomly at the banquet. But this week I've been thinking about that first group: when invited to the king's wedding feast, "they would not come." Even after the king describes the lush menu of oxen and fat calves these guests, "made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business."

These guests don't want to go. They want to do what they want to do
This invitation impinges on their own pursuits. They shrug off and reject the invitation because they have more important things to do...They don't need this invitation. They've got their farms and businesses.

This parable is the third in series that all have to do with there is the authority figure: a father, a landowner, a king
who doesn't ask for much: either for work, for fair share of crops, to come to the party. And in the parables, this head-figure tries over and over again
to get the subjects to follow a simple intention: sending multiple rounds of slaves and messengers even after the slaves are mistreated and killed. The head-figure is unrelenting in approaches and invitations. This Father, Landowner, King will try anything, risk everything to get the intention and invitation through.

But in each parable, the people subject to the parent, boss, or ruler cause the conflict. Are stubborn. Rebellious. Busy with farms and businesses and lives to attend to.

In thinking over this parable this week, I've realized...that's us too. That's the church as well. The ones who reject the invitation, cause the conflict. The rebellious. The stubborn, busy. The people who miss out on the party.

One thing that's uncomfortable about this group: the stakes are so high for rejecting the invitation. The people who decline the invitation really do miss out on the party. After the invitees won't go, the parable takes such drastic turn king goes and burns their city: It's perhaps an exaggerated way to say that to refuse the invitation is to bring a sort of calamity upon yourself: rejecting the invitation has real self-inflicted consequences that could lead to destruction

And it's death and destruction not only for the individual but also for *the city*. The person doesn't only miss out on the generosity, food, and benefits of the feast; everyone misses on the connections that are possible there. On the community that would be built there. On the shared atmosphere of love and care and common concern. They are also rejecting and missing out on that too.

I've been here at LCOS long enough to have seen this parable in action, to have seen the times when a generous, well-meaning, loving group of people host an event, invite the entire congregation or even a small group of people like committee members or the council, and only a few show up. Those around the table tend to have a great time, and that's well and good, but sometimes I'm left thinking about all the people who didn't show up, who refused the invitation. Did they know they were invited? That we really, really wanted them here?

And if they did get the invitation, and they chose not to come, well then I think, they are missing out...not just on a meal or some time with church-friends...they're also missing out on the relationships that could be built up in this place...missing out on the shared community that could be fostered here...missing out on the potential to grow together to grow God's ministry and love for a world that desperately needs us and the witness of Christ.

Many times we, the church, are that first group: rebellious, stubborn, conflicted, busy. The people who mess up the host's intention and miss out on the party.

The Good News is this: Our God goes to GREAT lengths to make sure we know we're invited again and again. Like the landowner and king who send slaves over and over, our God does not give up on extending an invitation. Our God will try anything, risk everything to get people to work together and to bring people into the fold.

Our God does this with dramatic gestures: dousing our heads with water to make sure we know an invitation has been extended. Through scripture, our God paints us a picture of the community and life of love and forgiveness to which God invites us. Every week, our God hosts a banquet and puts out tangible things like tiny pieces of bread and little sips of wine to make sure we can feel, literally, that we're invited.

That's what we mean with the phrase "means of grace": God makes sure there are tangible signs and outright words to show and tell us that we are invited. It's why the words, "Given FOR YOU" are so important when serving the bread and wine. Yes, even for you.

YOU ARE invited to the feast...into life of forgiveness and mercy...into Christ's community of love.

And the stakes are too high for missing out. So my prayer is that not only those of us here this morning but also those not here will accept the invitation. Because when we show up, that's when the real work, the party can begin.

AMEN.

Rev. Kathryn L. Pocalyko
Lutheran Church of Our Saviour
North Chesterfield, Virginia
October 15, 2017
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon series observing the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation
Topic: Means of Grace
Isaiah 25:1-9
Excerpt from Augsburg Confession, Article Five
Matthew 22:1-14