

**For many are called, but few are chosen!**



Twelve years ago, tens of millions of people sat glued to their televisions on April 29th, 2011 in order to watch the wedding of the decade. This was the day that Prince William and Kate Middleton were married. Of course some people didn't need to watch it on TV, because they had received one of the 1,9000 invitations to be a wedding guest. The crowd assembled in Westminster Abby that morning was comprised of the rich, famous, powerful and royal. Can you imagine receiving an invitation to the wedding and turning it down?

The setting of our gospel story today is similar to Kate and William's wedding. It involves a king, the wedding of his son, invitations refused, revenge, expanded guest list, and inappropriate wedding attire. ("The Invitation - Refused And Accepted" by Kevin Ruffcorn, October 9, 2011, sermoncentral.com)

Jesus hasn't moved from the steps of the temple where he has been for our last three Sunday gospel readings. He is still confronting the chief priests and the religious leaders over authority issues. Essentially, Jesus is telling them that it is often those who we may not expect who will be invited into the Kingdom.

The Temple leaders think that they are a shoe-in for heaven. They believe that they have lived their lives perfectly.

Jesus has other ideas, though. He sees a group of people who believe that their merit and their Jewish-birth-status have earned them salvation. They think that they are already there at the banquet, but the reality is, they haven't even responded to the invitation.

And, according to Jesus, a good party is a foretaste of heaven, full of people, full of celebration, an existence of goodness, mercy, forgiveness, joy, happiness, beauty, and love, but it is also an existence of responsibility ~ of doing things God's way. God sends us an open invitation to be part of His Kingdom, and it's up to us what we do with it.

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The invitation requires a dress code, and in our parable the garments are provided for the guests.

Now why would anyone refuse to wear the king's wedding clothes? After all, it is a valuable gift. But one particular man believes his clothing is good enough to be acceptable, considering he has bought them with his own money. He doesn't want or need charity or mercy. The king is grossly insulted and has him removed from the celebration.

This is an attitude many people have when it comes to God's grace. They believe they can earn their place in heaven by their good works.

Ask the average person how they think they'll get to heaven and they will say something like, "Live a life of doing more good things than bad things, and you'll go to heaven."

No. You enter heaven by admitting all your good works are like used clothing, and when you are invited by God to be part of His Kingdom life, there is one condition: you have to accept the gift from the King. You can't attend the banquet wearing your own clothes. You need to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.

("Your Invitation to the Royal Wedding" by Dr. David O. Dykes. Part 67 in the "Parables & Miracles" series)

The Bible uses clothing as a metaphor to show how we "put on" behaviour that is pleasing to God.

Every morning we get out of bed and dress for the day. We put on our clothing one piece at a time, starting with undergarments and progressing to outer wear - tops, pants, etc.

Character is likewise put on one piece at a time—one action at a time, and some things are easier to change than others. Character can be altered. Attitudes and damaging behaviour can be altered. But it requires that we have a deep desire to change, to repent.

We change when the **heart** is touched, when we embrace and actively seek to love God.

"This is not a "this-and-that" situation, but an "either-or" situation. In [other words], "It's God's way or the highway." There is no tweaking allowed here, no adjustments or revisions, no bargaining with God. It's not life one way on Sundays and another way on weekdays. We can't...expect God's forgiveness [of our sins] time and again. No, that won't work! God expects our allegiance 24/7." ("God's Way or the Highway" by William B. Bradshaw, Huffington Post, May 29, 2014)

Remember the words of Matthew 22, verse 37: ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.***

It's usually only then that lasting change can be created, that we have hope of wearing a new "robe." And we have to commit to following through.

Everyone is welcome at the table, but the table changes us. Or, to keep with the imagery of the parable, it changes our clothes. If it doesn't, then we aren't truly guests, just like the man who was not wearing a wedding garment.

We're wedding crashers, going through the motions of faith, lacking deep faith ~ personal, sincere and alive. It is no use accepting God's gracious invitation and then carrying on living our own way, not allowing it to make any difference.

In verse 5 of Matthew's parable the invited guests show little interest in their invitation. Some people are like that when you speak of faith; they brush it off. Others feel they have better things to do: head to Tim Horton's for Sunday coffee, or stay home to watch TV. If they were to respond to God's invitation it would take up their time and effort, and they don't want to do that.

The excuses may seem trite, and maybe that's part of the point. Jesus asks, you're turning down God's invitation for what exactly?

The judgement comes for not wearing the right robe—or having a frame of mind that God can't reach.

C.S. Lewis said, "*Out of ourselves, into Christ we must go.*"

God wants us at His banquet, but he expects us to come with a good heart, young and old alike.

A child named Amanda accepted His invitation, according to my closing story:

A woman took her feverish seven-year-old granddaughter to the doctor's office.

When he began his examination, and knowing that Amanda loved the Disney film "Frozen", the doctor looked in her ears and asked, "Who's in there? Olaf?"

She answered, "No."

He looked in her nose. "Who's in there? Anna?"

Again she said, "No."

The doctor then placed his stethoscope on her chest. "I think I hear Elsa in there."

Amanda replied, "No, Jesus is in my heart. Elsa's on my underwear." (adapted story from "What's Up, Doc?" Today's Christian Woman archive 1996, Stories for Sermons, kayala.com)

It doesn't matter who's on your underwear if Jesus is in your heart. And if Jesus is in your heart, your life will be clothed in proper apparel ~ faith, hope, love, forgiveness, tolerance and all the virtues of the Christian life. (Stories for Sermons, pp 475-476, kayala.com)

Don't leave God's invitation unanswered.

Accept it, and come to the banquet!

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Amen.

