

“Giving Jesus a Second Look”

Matthew 22:1-14, Proper 23-A, Oct 15, 2017

One of the classes I enjoyed the most while I was a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis was entitled: **“A Comparative Study of the Gospels.”** In this class, I learned that the first three Gospels in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark and Luke—for the most part—follow the same outline. In many respects they **“look alike!”** This is why theologians have called them for centuries now, the **“Synoptic Gospels,”** because the word **synoptic** means to **“look alike!”**

Furthermore, a number of Jesus’ teachings that are found in Matthew are also found in Mark’s Gospel and/or in Luke’s Gospel; but each of these writers, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, relays Jesus’ teachings to us from their own vantage point.

In his former life, Matthew, a Jew, was considered to be a **“turncoat”** by his fellow Jews, when he went to work as a tax-collector for the occupying government of the Roman Empire. But when Jesus called Matthew to become a disciple; Matthew was completely done with tax collecting altogether. He followed after Jesus!

Matthew writes his Gospel account primarily to other Jewish people like himself, whom he believed were far too hasty—in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited and Promised Messiah. Jesus’ did NOT fill the bill, as far as they were concerned, because of the type of Messiah they were expecting. That’s why Matthew quotes the Old Testament more often than any other Gospel writer—of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John!

Matthew’s primary message to his fellow countrymen was to give Jesus a second look!

Luke, on the other hand, was a Gentile writing his Gospel primarily for Gentiles (Luke 14:16-24). He was a very educated man, you might remember—who was a Medical Doctor (MD) by profession. Luke’s primary message is that Jesus is the compassionate Son of God.

Both Matthew and Luke share one of Jesus’ stories with us about a king/very wealthy man, who sends out invitations to their royal subjects/constituents to come and be his guests at the wedding festivities for his Son; including not only the Wedding Ceremony—but the gigantic feast that will follow.

Can’t you just picture in your mind what that whole experience might have been like! Just picture those invitations: gold-edged, hand-addressed by the royal calligrapher; each carrying the king’s own seal. What an honor to be on that guest list!

The big day arrives. The lights in the kitchens have been on all night. The air is rich with the smells of roasting veal and baking bread. The weary night shift has gone home, and the excited day crew has arrived. Thousands of bouquets of flowers have been delivered. Dozens of long tables are set with white linens and silver place settings.

The wine is poured, the candles are lit, and the waiters are dressed in spotless uniforms; each standing ready to serve! Finally the trumpets sound and the castle doors open ceremoniously for the invited guests. There is a collective gasp. No one is there! Something is terribly wrong.

The invited guests have "made light" (Matthew 22:5) of their invitations and thrown them aside -- into drawers, garbage cans, or piles of unopened mail on their desks. No one is planning to come.

But the banquet is still ready and God, the host, won't give up until the seats are filled. The new call is out -- and *everybody's* in! The slaves are sent out to round up anyone they can find, "both good and bad" (Matthew 22:10). This has become a "come-as-you-are" banquet.

With no entrance requirements, what a diverse list ends up in God's guest book! Here's the picture: business executives seated next to street people; inmates served the same feast as judges; and grease-encrusted hands brushing against well-manicured fingertips at the cake table.

As in the parable, the same call is out among us -- and everybody's still in! God's guest list continues to be inclusive and diverse. Yet we are all seated at the same table, feasting on the same meal, guests of the same host -- God. The differences in race, power, and social status, which seemed so important in our "old" lives, become less visible as God's grace, like a garment, covers us.

This is a "come-as-you-are-but-don't-stay-that-way" party!

Everybody who was invited and who responded by their participation in that Wedding Feast is totally enraptured by the wonder of it all! But then in verse 11 there is another great big "snag" that presents itself to us in this powerful parable that Jesus shares with us. Listen to verse 11 again: *"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment!"*

In the interpretation of this Gospel lesson, when the king enters the banquet hall to view the guests and to get a close look at all of them, suddenly his face darkens; his smile is replaced by a frown because all of a sudden he sees one man who is not wearing a wedding garment!

At this point the question may well be asked: "What else could the king expect?"

After all, verses 8-10 give us the distinct impression that these guests had been rushed from the streets and the street corners to the Wedding Hall, where the food was standing "ready!"

I know that there are some people who suggest—that all of the invited guests—except for one—had gone home to change clothes!

But does that really make sense when we remember that these people were all chosen from the underprivileged ranks. It's highly questionable whether or not so many of these folks would have even had a tuxedo or a beautiful chiffon ball gown hanging in their closets at home! It's more likely that they didn't even have, what we used to call "Sunday clothes," when I was growing up in their closets at all! And they certainly would have had no money with which to buy them! And even if they had had the money, there probably would have been no time whatsoever—to make or to purchase those costly robes!

There is only one solution, as I can see it that will help us out of this difficulty! It is an old one and until someone comes up with something better, it must stand! It is that, by the command of the king and from his bountiful supplies, at the very entrance of the wedding hall a wedding robe had been offered to each guest!

ALL EXCEPT THIS ONE PERSON HAD GRACIOUSLY RECEIVED THAT ROBE AS A GIFT THAT THE KING WAS EXTENDING TO THEM. This one man, however, had looked at his own robe! Maybe he even took his own hand and lightly brushed it off with his hand, and had

then told the attendant, “My own robe is good enough! I don’t need the one you are offering to me!”

Then, in an attitude of self-satisfaction and defiance, he had marched to the table, where he was presently reclining; or from which, when the king entered, he, along with the other guests, had just now arisen!

Proceeding on the assumption, therefore, that such a garment had been offered to each guest and that the king expected the offered robe to be accepted and worn, his speech and action with respect to the man who had treated the royal order with contempt is not surprising!

In verses 12-13, we read: *“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!’”*

In order to give the man an opportunity to justify himself if he can do so, the king addresses him, even in a rather friendly manner, and then pauses waiting for that man’s reply! But the man, realizing that he has no ground to stand on and that any excuse would be useless, is reduced to utter silence.

This is when the king orders him to be bound hand and foot and to be cast into a region of total darkness, a darkness that is a **SHARP CONTRAST WITH THE LIGHT THAT FILLS THE WEDDING HALL!**

Yes, there is a great deal of emphasis that is placed on this man’s own responsibility and guilt. But does this mean now that the others—who did receive the wedding garment and are wearing it—have themselves to thank for their deed of obedience! Not at all!

“For many are called, but few are chosen!” The Gospel call goes forth far and wide. It reaches ever so many, many people. Most of them are like the man here in Jesus’ parable. They hear but they do not respond.

And in comparison with those people that are lost there are but few that are saved—and these are the few that are chosen from eternity by God to inherit eternal life! Salvation this is not a human accomplishment but the gift of God’s sovereign grace!”

Brothers and sisters, Matthew’s version of Jesus’ parable seems to be much more harsh in its tone and demeanor, that is this same parable when it is relayed to us by Luke, the good physician!

If our 41st President of the United States—George Herbert Walker Bush—used to call out to the American people—in the hopes that collectively—together—we might be: “A kinder and gentler American,” St. Luke whose primary message presents Jesus to the world as “The compassionate Son of God,” is calling for the people in his congregation to be a kinder and gentler Church!

Brothers and sisters it is also very important to remember that when we are listening to the parables of Jesus, that they are indeed parables!

Certainly these words of Jesus are a parable—because real people don’t turn down a king’s dinner invitation, much less torture and kill the messengers who came to fetch them; because once you have a whole ox and several fatted calves—on serving platters—they won’t

keep while you wage war on a whole city, kill its inhabitants and torch the place! Because who really expects someone who is nabbed in the middle of an oil change to have a clean wedding garment in the back of their truck?

For all of those times, especially in Matthew's Gospel, where the words of Jesus that are recorded for us there – seem to be very harsh and even frightening – there were also plenty, and I mean plenty of other times, when Luke as a physician, looking back on Jesus' life—realized that Jesus had spent a great deal of his ministry changing bandages on people who were deeply wounded by a brutal form of religion—especially the kind—embodied and promoted by the Pharisees in Jesus' day!

Yes, there are times—when we need to make certain that we are not rounding off edges on Jesus' teachings—that Jesus meant to keep sharp!

But how about you, my brothers and my sisters? Are you willing to give Jesus a second look today? And especially for those of you who may have never really heard the Gospel before, or had it presented to you in a way that made it the very, very attractive message that is is—will you also give a second look to the Gospel of Jesus Christ today!

There are a number of places in the New Testament where we can read comparisons being made between our receiving Jesus Christ by faith as our personal Lord and Savior, to our also putting on a fresh change of clothes—garments that only God can give to us!

Take Galatians 3:27, for example, where St. Paul writes: *“For as many of you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ!”*

And again Paul writes to the Colossians: *“Put on them, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; bearing with one another and, if one has compassion against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony!*

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful! Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:12-17)! AMEN