

“Invited to the Feast”

You get the mail, and there it is, a wedding invitation. The truth be told, sometimes you are excited about the invitation – and other times, not.

How well do you know this person, this family? Is the wedding date open on your calendars? What’s the venue – what church, where’s the reception – what will this celebration be like – will it be fun? Do you feel obligated to attend?

All kinds of things go through your mind. Sometimes you just want to ignore it, blow it off, not give it a second thought. Other times you just don’t see how you can make it – because that’s such a busy weekend. Maybe you decide that you’ll make an appearance. But sometimes you just can’t wait to attend – you can wait to join in the celebration.

Jesus tells a parable about a king (His Father) inviting people to the wedding feast of His Son. Out go the invitations. Come! Join me in celebrating the marriage of my Son, and His Bride, the Church. He wants you to be part of the celebration – to feast with Him, and His Son, and His Bride.

He sends His servants out to call those invited to the wedding feast, “but they would not come.” Imagine inviting people to the wedding celebration of your child – but those invited will not come.

Again, He sends His servants with the invitation. Everything has been prepared – the oxen and fatten calves – “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.” I’ve prepared everything – just come and feast and celebrate.

The liturgy helps us to understand what this feast is. Sometimes in the liturgy we sing – “This is the feast of victory for our God.” Sometimes we pray: “Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son’s body and blood.”

This wedding feast, ultimately, is the unending feast of heaven – but already now, here in the Divine Service, we have a “foretaste” of that feast. Heaven on earth. Already now we are gathered into God’s presence to celebrate with Him – and with all the saints, all believers in Christ.

Everything has been prepared. On the mountain called Calvary – Jesus has swallowed up death forever – conquering it by His bloody death. Now, here on this mountain – Jesus wipes away tears from all faces, with His victory over sin, death and the devil – He takes away the reproach of all sinners, taking away all your sin.

“It is finished,” Jesus says from the cross. “Come to the wedding feast,” the Father says to you today – for the salvation I have prepared through my Son is “for you.” I have made all things ready. There is nothing for you to do. Just come – come and feast on the meal I have prepared – and rejoice with me and my Son.

Is it any wonder that God the Father is angry when His invitation is blown off like it is a nothing – when we are too busy with farm and business – when His invitation is received by seizing His messengers, treating them shamefully, and killing them?

You can’t sugarcoat this parable, folks. Don’t fool yourselves into thinking this parable has nothing to do with you. Jesus is telling you the Father is angry with those who despise His invitation and the feast He has prepared – that God the Father will send His troops to destroy and burn.

Why? Because you will not come to the “foretaste” of His feast – and if you will not come to His Divine Service prepared for you now – you will not come to His heavenly feast. And that angers Him more than anything else.

Those who will not be gathered to God by His invitation now, are not worthy of feasting with Him for all eternity. But the Father does not pick up His marbles and go home – He sends out His invitation to “as many as you find.” EVERYONE is invited – after all, Jesus’ “it is finished” victory over death is for the whole world. No one is left out. YOU are not left out!

Like those first invited, no one is “worthy” – but all are invited, “both bad and good.” Whether the world labels you as “good” or “bad” – you are not worthy – but you ARE invited. And the wedding hall is filled – and God the Father is most pleased to have you gathered for His feast.

Behold, what a glorious scene – the wedding hall is filled with guests – but wait, the parable is not over. The king sees a man “who had no wedding garments.” “How did you get in here?” He asks. This one is not here on the Father’s terms – but on his own terms.

God the Father has provided you with the garment of Christ’s righteousness – the garments of His salvation. To be clothed with this wedding garment is to confess that “I am not worthy” – to be baptized into Christ, clothed with Christ – believing that, in Him, all this is necessary for your salvation “is finished” – completed by Christ, with nothing left for you to do.

But if you will not wear what He has provided – if you think that you can stand before God now, or enter heaven on your own terms, clothed with your own garments of righteousness – then you will be cast out “into the outer darkness” where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Dearly beloved, today the Father calls you to the feast. The forgiveness, life and salvation that He has prepared for you by the death of His Son – He delivers to you today in this foretaste of the feast to come.

Come, “let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Come, let us be gathered to our heavenly Father and recline at His Table – now at this altar, and forever at His heavenly feast. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.