Albany Presbyterian Church

October 11th 2026. For many are invited, only a few are chosen. Matthew 22:1-14

With just a few weeks before the election, we hear political parties' promises in the media and elsewhere, all dreaming of a better life and a better country for everyone. One talks about the cost of living, health care, housing, and how to fund major social and health systems that improve people's lives, while another talks about improving the economy and creating a competitive market that makes society safer and healthier. And yet another promises affordable living while protecting the environment, ensuring equal opportunities, and narrowing the gap between the rich and poor. Though we are so blessed to live here, a peaceful country where no politicians dare to abuse their power outright, no one offers to pay us for voting for their party; we know that we don't have a perfect government, no one really gets it right, and we don't believe they will completely satisfy our expectations, desires and hopes for our world.

Reminds me of a book called 'The City of God', written by Augustin, one of the Church Fathers, in the 5th century, as the Roman Empire neared collapse, in response to many who blamed Christianity for the empire's fall, that the empire is falling because it turned away from its gods, paganism, and polytheism. Augustine argues that the empire did not fall because of Christian faith, but because of its own internal moral decay, corruption from an impure and unrepentant heart, and a failure to live a Christian life of justice and peace.

He said there are two symbolic cities in the world: one is the civitas Dei, the city of God, composed of those who love God and live by his grace, striving for selfless love and eternal salvation, and the other is the city of men, who love only themselves and earthly power, filled with pride and vanity, and end up in moral decay. Yet God is in both cities; he is sovereign there; he is at work, hidden, working through his providence, common grace, and the hidden ordering of history even in the city of men. And he grants earthly peace, order, justice and grace to all in that city. Under God's sovereignty, his love and goodness, the two worlds exist together, intermingled and intertwined, with God present in all, especially in those who belong to the city of God on earth. Ultimately, the coming of the Kingdom of God will bring true peace when God judges the quick and the dead; the body will be resurrected, and the City of God will triumph.

Today we are invited to read another parable Jesus told with those who stood with him in the temple of Jerusalem: the chief priests, the temple elders, and the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who were earlier called the wicked tenants of God's vineyard, who were looking for ways to have Jesus stopped or even killed.

We are invited to read this story again not as a parable from a distant time, but as a story told to us living here and now, in our own moment in history.

So, this is a parable: a King preparing a wedding banquet for his Son, going all out with a fine feast, spreading the best of the best in the whole Kingdom's offerings. When it is ready, he sends his servants to the first-tier people, the King's friends, maybe the nobility, and those supposedly in his close circle. The King sent his servants with an invitation for everyone to join his joyous celebration, but they returned empty-handed because everyone refused to come. I don't understand why anyone would refuse an invitation to a wedding banquet, especially the King's. The King sent his servants again, this time more urgently. But they rejected him once again.

In Luke 14:15-24, the same parable appears, but in Luke, Jesus was in a Pharisee's house instead of the temple in Jerusalem. There, in Luke, each of those who said no to his invitation gives the king an excuse: one just bought a field and had to inspect it; another just bought five oxen and needed to try them out; the third had just married and could not come. All good excuses, excuses that we also can understand.

But not only did they refuse the King, according to Matthew, but they also harassed his servants and even killed some of them. Who would do such a thing?

Even for this being typical of midrash, the Jewish teaching style of the time, it is dramatic and shocking: lots of killing, lots of being thrown into the dark, beaten up.

But this story pushes us even further to see the King in fury, sending his army to destroy those who rejected and killed his servants. It troubles us, for we like God who is meek, gentle, patient, and kind. But the gospel says, as Jesus also keeps saying, that though God is all that, gentle and kind, gracious and generous, he will not tolerate those who persecute God's servants, who rise against the Son of God and ultimately turn against God himself. Someday his patience will run out, and God will bring judgment and vengeance.

This story also teaches us about God's grace.

And that the invitation to the King's banquet represents God's grace, freely given to all he chooses.

It was God's choice to send his servants, though rejected, and even then, he sent his servants again to go out to the streets; Luke says to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, and in Matthew, it was to tax collectors and prostitutes, to all unlikely people deemed unclean and sinful by the religious authorities and the Pharisees. The King sends out his servants also twice into the street to bring more people, so his banquet hall is full and his joy is complete.

And the King walks around the banquet hall, greeting and delighting in those who came, but then he finds a man without a banquet cloth. Furious again, he orders him thrown out, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Dress code for the King's banquet... what would this mean? What does the proper garment for the banquet represent?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says God's grace is for all, though we don't ever deserve God's grace and can't do anything to earn it. God give it freely and unconditionally. Yet true grace is never cheap grace, a passive "anything goes" grace; it is costly because the ultimate price for God's grace was Jesus and his death and resurrection. Therefore, true grace is God's unmerited favour, God's help and active power, extended to us through forgiveness of sins and awakening truth, that transforms our lives through his Holy Spirit.

And so, what it is saying is that those who come to the King's banquet unchanged are not fit for the Kingdom of God. The King orders him to be taken out, thrown into darkness where they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable challenges Matthew's community, and even us, as we live in a world that often asks us to choose our priorities and our belonging.

Though living on this earth, we do not belong to the city of man. We belong to God's city. Ultimately, the city of God will triumph when the Kingdom of God comes. Our first reading of Isaiah 25 offers us a great insight into the city of God, describing a world radically transformed by God. A world where ruthless empires will fall, abusive power and corruption laid low; where the economic exploitation of the poor will end; and where such tyranny will be permanently dismantled, never to be rebuilt. A world where the poor and needy will no longer be crushed. A world where no bother, war, or famine will divide people and nations, where all will be invited to a great celebration of God on his Holy mountain, in verse 6, with the greatest wines and choice foods, in abundance and joyful communion with one another and with God.

In this world, all veils of deception and spiritual blindness, lies, and grief that hang heavily over all nations will be lifted, and all will experience deep healing by the power of God, who will wipe away all tears from our faces; a world where God himself will take away sin and death and give us eternal life, where all life will flourish and be completely free.

So, what does that mean and how does this apply to us?

Firstly, we rejoice as Paul says in Philippians 4:4: rejoice in the Lord always, in God's amazing grace, his relentless invitation to his great feast in his Kingdom, a grace freely given through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, we remember that God's grace does not depend on us, yet it requires a response. The Spirit of God is at work in us; as we submit to God's invitation, so he can transform our lives, clothe us in God's righteousness, and make us like Christ in his righteousness and truth.

We live in two spiritual cities, deeply intermingled and intertwined. It is easy to give in to the world's pressure. It is easy to stay under the veil of deception and spiritual blindness. As Augustin says, we are called to live as good people of the earth, while keeping our ultimate loyalty and affection set on God above.

And so, we respond in faith, a genuine submissive faith. For God delights in the fullness of his banquet; he invites us all to enter, but only those who respond with true faith and commitment to Christ, expressed in active, grateful love, forgiveness, and obedience, will enter and join this great celebration.

Many are invited, but only a few are chosen.