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October 1, 2023
Joint Service/World Communion Sunday
Matthew 22:1-14

“God Loves All-Part 2”

Last week I preached on the odd parable from Matthew’s gospel about the manager who pays all his workers the same wage no matter when they show up for work. That is a parable a lot of us have trouble with, because if someone shows up for work late – let’s say at 4:45pm when they should have been there at 9:00am, they shouldn’t get paid the same wage as the person who showed up on time! But as I said last week, the parable shows us that God is not fair – at least not according to our definition of fair. But God is gracious. And God’s grace extends to all of us, whether we show up 9:00am or 4:45pm, because God loves us all equally.

Well, some of you had questions about the sermon. One person asked after church, “If that’s all true, What about the sheep and goats?” Good question. Another said, “But Annie, if everyone is paid the same, the next day everyone will show up for work at 4:45!”

Those comments got me to thinking, so I decided to preach an unplanned follow-up. If God love us all equally, what about the sheep and goats? Do we get a hall pass every day we show up late for work? Is this how grace works?

Sometimes a sermon, and almost always a parable –gets us to think. And if we walk away scratching heads, or even proclaiming, “I don’t know what it all means, but I’m certain I don’t like it!” then we know we’re starting to understand it.

Today, we get a parable about judgment. And, we get a parable that really leaves us scratching our heads. What are we to make of a parable about a king who throws a wedding reception for his son and people refuse to come? And when some finally do decide to come, the king kicks out of the party the guy who wasn’t dressed appropriately. I mean, what’s that all about? The guy was pulled off the street to go to the prince’s wedding reception. It’s not like we’re all wandering around all day dressed in our finest at the ready to go to a big party. Certainly that’s not what is expected of us. Or is it?

Now this wedding party began like all wedding parties began – and even do today. With a save the date card. This is then followed, was followed, by the real invitation, which in our parable was carried by the king's servants to the royal guest list. It likely was a who's who of the town; only the upper crust would have been invited to this party. But they refused to come.

So the king sent different servants to tell the invited guests that he's really gone all out. You know, oxen and fatted calves are on the menu. Which is the Bible's way of saying that only the finest meal has been prepared. But the people made light of it; they treated the invitation as a joke and went about their business. Some even assaulted and killed the servants! I guess they didn't appreciate the reminder card.

Well, as you can imagine, this really ticked off the king. So he sent his troops to kill those who had killed his servants and then he burned their city. He told his remaining servants, "Those who were invited weren't worthy. So go into the streets, and invite everyone you see, both the good and the bad, to come to my party." And they all came. Of course! The wedding hall was filled with guests.

See, God does love us all! I was right! The inclusive nature of the party cannot be dismissed. Any observance of social status or religious regulations, of which there would have likely been quite a few, do not matter. Even one's ethical behavior is set aside in favor of the urgency of the king's invitation. All that matters is that the reception hall is full and all have been invited.

But then, the radical inclusiveness comes to a screeching halt when the king encounters the guest who is not properly attired and proceeds to kick him out of the party to the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Which is the Bible's way of saying, he's going where none of us want to go.

So much for loving all of us equally. So much for showing up for work the next day at 4:45! But is it that God doesn't love us all equally, that we really can't show up at 4:45 and expect to get paid the same? Or is it just that once we get to work, there's a job to be done?

Friends, I think it's the latter. We're all loved. But we shouldn't take it for granted. The doors of the kingdom community **are thrown** wide open, and the invitation

extends literally **to all**. But once you come in, there are standards. You can't go on acting like you're not at an extraordinary party.

One of the things we sometimes forget is that while God loves us all, no exceptions, that does not mean the acceptance comes without expectations, otherwise acceptance becomes meaningless. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that grace is not a refuge from obedience, but an invitation to transformation.

You see, the poor guy who got bounced from the king's wedding banquet figured there wasn't anything expected of him. He assumed that all he needed to do was show-up. In the church, using the words of Bonhoeffer, we call this "cheap grace".

There's a fine line between showing up for work at 4:45 and getting the same pay, and showing up for work and then doing nothing. As Charlotte's old boss used to say to her employees, if you got time for leanin', you got time for cleanin'! People who tend to wallow in grace and think nothing is expected of them may be surprised by the king's question, "Friend, how did you get in here dressed like that?"

Because there are expectations for how we will behave. Whether we are the guest, the king, or the person who's been unexpectedly invited, there are expectations.

It reminds me of what someone once said, that while I like to say that God loves me as I am, and I believe that to be true, I also have to admit that God calls me, to new life, and you to new life; and that call is a call to change, to transform, and to be the people God wants us to be, hopes for us to be, and expects us to be.

I think it goes without saying that there are people in the Christian community who are like the people in the parable who refuse the invitation from God in one way or another. They want the safe, soft side of discipleship, but they shy away from the more difficult work of outreach and social justice. They want peace on earth, but they do not want to work toward that end. They want to end world hunger, but they do not want to miss a meal themselves or make a contribution to that end. Hashtag blessed! But live their life refusing to extend those blessings to others.

To use a sports metaphor – which I rarely do but now that I know who Travis Kelce is! When the king’s first invited guests refused his invitation, he did what many coaches on sports teams do; he shifted the lineup that was on the field. When a coach believes that the players in the game have lost their energy or their focus or their desire to win, the coach does not just concede the game to the other team. The coach is more likely to bench those who were playing and put somebody else in the game instead.

Friends, God has the authority to bench those who refuse to answer God’s invitation for service. Because Gospel living only begins with the invitation. It doesn’t end there. It’s not enough to just RSVP and then show up. Indeed, it is not enough to call yourself a follower of Christ and then act as if you were sound asleep during the Sermon on the Mount. It is not enough to pledge allegiance to church membership without then vowing to live out that chosenness in the world. It is not enough say you are a “Christian” and then stay silent when life, liberty, and love are in jeopardy.

But if this isn’t enough . . . there’s even more expected. You see, not only did the guy come dressed inappropriately, but he was boring! He failed to party! The kingdom of heaven is compared to a banquet, a wedding reception! Which means you’ve got to put on your party clothes and get on the dance floor! It’s a joy and delight to be a guest at the prince’s wedding, so we should come ready to party!

Friends, today is a celebration. And your staff have prepared something special for you as our way of saying “thank you”. Thank you for being you. Thank you for coming dressed with kindness, grace, love and justice in all that you do for this church. Thank you for all that you do. So come, come with your most joyous selves to gather around the table where the Lord invites us all to the feast which he has prepared.

Amen.

[Feasting on the Word](#), Volume 4, Year A, commentary for Matthew 22:1-14

[Feasting on the Gospels](#), commentary for Matthew 22:1-14

www.workingpreacher.org, commentaries for Matthew 22:1-14

