

**Title:** Preparations for the Wedding Banquet

**Subtitle:** Saying ‘Yes’ to the Dress’: Putting on the garments of salvation.

Last week, we heard about an upward call, a heavenly call. Today’s readings help us to understand what a proper response to that call looks like through the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. In it, Jesus expresses how passionately our God wants us to come to the wedding banquet he has prepared for His Son.

The breath of the invitation is unparalleled. To gather off the streets, anyone who would come is a wonder to behold; that God would bring us in, wash us, clothe us, and feed us is something so grand and glorious that it will take an eternity to appreciate fully.

Yet with all that is so freely offered in this parable, something else pulls us off guard when we hear that those invited ***“made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business,”***<sup>1</sup> while the rest were even hostile towards those who invited them. Yet Isaiah’s description of the feast is more desirable than anyone could imagine. He says it will be a ***“feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine strained clear.”***<sup>2</sup> We learn from the New Testament that this feast holds out pardon for the past, renewal in the present, and glory for the future. The Lord of the Feast is the God who is our helper, his Son is our bridegroom, and the Spirit is the source of all joy. When God becomes our chief delight, then with him, he provides us with all things. In other words, the feast gives us a taste of heaven here

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:5

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 25:6

on earth and offers a living hope for a future beyond our wildest imagination.

Weddings are joyous occasions filled with music, dancing, and singing. Everything is freely offered. But once invited, we must be prepared to dress for the part. Therefore, the parable also provides an addendum stating, **“When the King came in to look at the guests, he saw a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘*Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?*’ And he was speechless.”**<sup>3</sup>

The shocking judgment that follows seems totally out of character, but it alludes to something New Testament writers explain. St. John’s Book of Revelation has a vision of heaven with **“*a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes.*”**<sup>4</sup> Then one of the elders asks, **“*Who are these, and where did they come from?*”**<sup>5</sup> The answer given states, **“*These are the ones who have ...washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*”**<sup>6</sup> Later, St. John wrote, **“*Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*”**<sup>7</sup>

Wedding dresses have always held a fascination because of all the work put into them. In the reality TV show, “Say ‘Yes’ to

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:11-12

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 7:9

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 7:13

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 7:14b

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 19:7-8

the Dress,” every possible size and shape of wedding dress is paraded before the bride-to-be. The drama starts when the bride has no idea what she wants and is torn by well-meaning friends and relatives who have definite ideas about what she should wear. Getting everyone to agree is where personal tastes clash.

Spiritually speaking, we all have a part to play in our preparation for the King’s wedding feast. Paul wrote, ***“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”***<sup>8</sup>

Our New Testament lesson from Philippians describes things that will help us be adorned with virtues, which are becoming for a royal princess. Paul begins with tender words before addressing issues that might blemish that wedding dress. He calls them ***“my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.”***<sup>9</sup> His tender words urge them to ***“stand firm in the Lord.***

Then, he expresses his concern for two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were his faithful and constant attendants, and he asks the church leaders ***“to help these women.”***<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes, discord, if left unresolved, will tarnish our Christian witness. Therefore, their help to these women would beautify the garments of salvation with the virtues of genuine love.

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<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:12 & 14

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 4:1a

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 4:2b

Then Paul said, ***“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice.”***<sup>11</sup> When Paul talked about “rejoicing,” he did so in a way rooted in grace. The root word for rejoice in Greek is the word for grace and undeserved favor.<sup>12</sup> The root word for grace is also closely related to *joy*,<sup>13</sup> for ***“in God’s presence is the fullness of joy.”***<sup>14</sup>

The pathway to joy can be a hard-fought battle. It requires of us an even-tempered spirit. Paul says, ***“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”***<sup>15</sup> That nearness means that the Wedding Feast is at hand. Therefore, let’s adorn our lives with a “gentleness” that involves being “forbearing, reasonable, and even moderate”<sup>16</sup> when circumstances provoke an overreaction.

One of the saddest things in the world is the vision of an unhappy bride. As the bride of Christ, we need to deal with our anxieties so that we are ready to greet the Lord with joy. So, ***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”***<sup>17</sup> Prayer is offering our desires to God and making them known to him, and thanksgiving is a necessary accompaniment. It should never be absent from our devotions. Then ***“God’s peace, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”***<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Philippians 4:4

<sup>12</sup> Strong’s Concordance #5463 chairó, (from the root [5485](#) /xáris, "grace")

<sup>13</sup> Strong’s Concordance #5479 chara (χαρά) joy, delight

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 16:11

<sup>15</sup> Philippians 4:5

<sup>16</sup> Strong’s Concordance #1933 (ep-ee-i-kace’), seemly, equitable, yielding; Usage: gentle, mild, forbearing, fair, reasonable, moderate

<sup>17</sup> Philippians 4:6

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 4:7

Lastly, we must carefully handle our thoughts so that we might enhance our lives with a positive, joyful spirit. Paul writes, ***“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”***<sup>19</sup> This admonition goes with ***“loving the Lord with all of our ...mind.”***<sup>20</sup> It requires a concentrated effort that will ultimately bring God glory.

This admonition is most challenging when the Spirit of our age is filled with cynicism and despair. Thinking about praiseworthy things will require putting a limit on the amount of exposure you have to worldly influences. In my experience as a chaplain, I noticed that the most depressed people had the TV on 24 hours a day.

These admonitions provide practical advice in preparation for the Wedding feast that awaits our Master’s return. The King in our parable declares, ***“Everything is now ready.”***<sup>21</sup> A royal wedding feast awaits. So, let’s be prepared to come, ready and dressed for the occasion. Amen.

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<sup>19</sup> Philippians 4:8

<sup>20</sup> Mark 12:30

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 22:4