



**St. Andrew's By-the-Sea**  
***The Episcopal Church***  
***in Destin, Florida***

“Come to the banquet; come prepared.”  
October 15, 2023  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Matthew 22:1-14

A Homily by The Rev'd Jo P. Popham

It was our first Thanksgiving meal in our new home. The table was set with our best china and silver. Jim had cooked the turkey to perfection outside on the grill. We had two kinds of stuffing: southern cornbread and sausage chestnut. We had pumpkin soup ready for the first course. We had fresh cranberry sauce made with red wine, garlic mashed potatoes, squash casserole, green bean casserole, and green peas with baby onions. The wine was breathing. The Trinity rolls were rising. Jim's famous pecan pie was on the sideboard awaiting the whipped cream. We knew we had cooked for too many. We always do. But that is what we do.

One of the children who shall go unnamed came into the kitchen and laughed out loud. He asked what in the world were we going to do with all that food? Now, this is the kid that at Christmas would order extra donuts and rolls to be delivered at the deli where he once worked so that he would have lots leftover to take to the homeless shelter. So he was rightly concerned about food going to waste. We have a large family, but usually on Thanksgiving we would invite people who had no family nearby to come and join us at our table. I had even been known to go out and asked strangers to join us on occasion, and we had always been enriched by the extra people at our table. This child of mine kept laughing as I was stirring things and making sure that everything was just so for our meal. He asked: “Mom, who are you going to ask to come in to fill up the table? The fish?” You see we had just moved to an island. For anyone in need of a place to eat to find us they would have to have a boat.

I picked up the phone and went to another room away from the laughter that continued in the kitchen. I called the Salvation Army in the town just 15 minutes from us. I told them what we wanted to do. And they said “Please, come to our table.” They only had 9 beds for the unhoused, but with the staff there were 12 people who were willing to share

a meal with us. So we packed up the entire meal in the coolers we used in the summer, put it all in the boat, and went to town to share our meal. It was a wonderful celebration of thanksgiving for everyone. Jim did not have on a coat and tie to carve the turkey. Noone cared if I didn't put on my best holiday dress to help serve the meal. Aunt Weebish was the only one who was dressed up. I think the kids even had on their duck hunting boots they wore in the boat.

Just as our holiday feast takes many hands many hours, in first century Palestine, a wedding feast could take quite a while to prepare. A host would send his servants to invite the guests – no US postal service, or email or texts, no facebook friend updates or twitter messages – no, those special ones who were invited to a wedding feast were told in person to make ready. Then the servants would go out again to tell them when the elaborate dinner was prepared and it was time to come to the party. But the host in Jesus's parable was the king. And the bridegroom whose marriage they were celebrating with a banquet was the king's son. To disobey the king's summons was an act of treason. To kill his messengers, his servants, amounted to an insurrection. So the king sent out his troops to burn their homes.

With the feast already prepared and waiting, the food getting cold, and the king's disappointment having grown into anger, he sent his servants out to gather up all the people – the good and the bad – to come to the wedding feast. And we can surmise that all the people enjoyed a wonderful meal – except the underdressed fellow who was thrown out of the wedding feast. Now, it was the custom of the host to provide his guests with suitable apparel. So to not wear the provided garment showed a lack of appreciation and respect. There would really be no excuse for not wearing his wedding clothes. No wonder the king was speechless.

If we see the king as God, we might also see the first invited guests as those who did not recognize Jesus as God's son. When the table was filled, it was with unlikely guests – with everyone – good and bad – everyone who was prepared to come, not just those who were first deemed worthy. The table was filled with all of God's people. So then all are

welcome at God's banquet table. But what of the guest who refused to wear the provided wedding robe? Who is he in this parable? Some scholars interpret the man without the proper attire to be Jesus's disciples who did not count the cost of following him? The wedding garment could refer to the robe of conversion, of repentance for one's sins. Could it be that this ill-clad fellow was counted the same as those who rejected Jesus altogether? That is how he was treated, yet it seems inconsistent given Jesus's role in salvation, that salvation is meant for all God's people. Perhaps Jesus was only using Jewish hyperbole, but then he ends with the moral of his parable saying that "many are called, but few are chosen." Yes, many different people will be in God's Kingdom. But what about those who overtly reject God's invitation and what about those who ultimately fail to accept God's hospitality and come ill-prepared to God's table? Will they not have a place in God's Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus spoke using parables about who will and will not be welcomed with open arms into the Kingdom of God. All of these similar teachings were delivered in the Temple in Jerusalem. The religious leaders of the Temple had challenged him. So here again Jesus exposed their wicked and rebellious natures. He made it most clear who was worthy and who was not worthy in God's eyes. The king's judgment on his guests was swift and fierce just as God's judgment is clear for those who rejected his son and for those who are not prepared to accept God's hospitality.

That Thanksgiving afternoon at the Salvation Army stands out as one of the top celebrations for me and my family. Our table was ready but it was not full of guests, so we took the feast to them – to those many might call the least of God's people. But that is not how we saw that meal. To us we were the guests. The people who called the Salvation Army's shelter their home that Thanksgiving Day welcomed us to their table. We were the ones who were thankful. They did not turn us away as wealthy do-gooders. They took us in and sat us at their table. We shared stories, not knowing that ironically their story would later become our story. We could have been like the religious leaders who thought we had it all figured out, knowing that we were going straight to heaven for

the good things we had done. They really had no idea what their future might hold; we only thought we knew our future. We would never have guessed that we would one day be without a home like those who welcomed us as guests when they said “Please, come to our table.” We learned in a very real way that everyone is welcome at God’s banquet table. In many ways they prepared us for our future.

May we all learn to come when we are called to God’s feast, and may we be prepared when we take our seat at the table.

Lord may it be so. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> This sounds to me like one of the previous parables – like the son who said he would do the father’s will but then chose not to go and work in the vineyard.