

Sermon –19th Pentecost
Matthew 22:1-14
October 15, 2017

“It’s God’s Party”

*Nobody knows where my Johnny has gone, but Judy left the same time
why was he holding her hand, when he's supposed to be mine?....Play all my records, keep dancing all
night, but leave me alone for a while, till Johnny's dancing with me
I've got no reason to smile. (Come on now you boomers) "It's my party and I'll.... cry if I want to; cry if I
want to; cry if I want to, you would cry too, if it happened to you".*

Imagine it was your party and not Leslie Gore’s. You were the loved struck teen who got your parent’s permission to host a Friday night event, you got all the right (legal) beverages and snacks, and your music list was “to die for” - you did everything to make it the party of the week including getting the cute guy or girl you’ve been eying in the hallway for weeks to come. Then it *happened to you* – like Ms. Gore sings about. Drama happens! If you were anything like the king in the story of Matthew, you wouldn’t let your Judy and Johnny practically inhale each other in the corner- they’d be shown the door, no – you’d snapchat em a picture of your front door under the caption “*go try it out*”!

Imagine mom and dad it was your child’s party, and they’d passed out invites to their classmates well in advance, picked out the theme decorations and chose nothing but cool items for those little gift bags you pass out when everybody goes home. Then 4 o’clock arrived but not a single car with a parent dropping off a single 3rd grader did. How would you feel - angry or just intensely sad? Would you pick up the phone and make some calls? And what would you say to the first parent – what would you say to your kid? There must be some misunderstanding?

The parable of the Wedding Banquet is startling given the intensity of the reactions. Who would kill someone for simply delivering a banquet invitation? Who would destroy an entire city in response to being socially slighted? And who, after going to all the trouble of getting others to come would then reject so publically one of these “*second tier guests*?” No one - but then again, who would be so callous as to use the occasion of his girlfriend’s party to announce he was dumping her? How could a parent through their child endure the sting of a birthday party no one came to? Matthew’s story hits hard because it hits home. It’s not hard to imagine heartache – it happens all the time. And we all have our pride.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet is often avoided because of its suggestion that God is like a prideful king given to rage. It has rough edges because it’s about how rough love can be sometimes. It’s included in the stories Jesus told during the week of his passion – after his entry into Jerusalem. When someone is about to be die, particularly if they know the betrayal of a friend will play a big role in it, they may very well and very understandably be inclined to say some honest things. This is an honest if edgy portrayal of how passionate God is for us. Some say it announces the “replacement” of Israel in favor of the church – out with the old in the new and all that. But dear church members, be careful, for if such an interpretation holds you may be forced to ask “*well then which one of us is the guy who might be tossed for lack of wearing the proper garment?*” “*Surely not I Lord!*”

The Wedding Banquet parable contains a couple of “*listen up good*” messages for the auxiliary guest list – that would be you and me. First, you are part of a group like it or not, called “*the good and the bad*” – and that is a message about “*worthiness*.” The good and the bad enter by grace – or not at all. If any of us remain, it will be by acknowledging the good graces by which we’ve been allowed in, and that we good and bad alike need to keep an eye on one another lest the good get proud of their goodness or the bad complacent about their badness. If heaven has name tags they’ll all say the same thing – “*hello, my name is Grace*”.

Second, with the invitation comes expectation. The gown of the disciple is the only one on the rack in God’s kingdom. Not of perfection – those are out of stock. Not of mediocrity – those are out of style. Not of exceptional giftedness - those don’t fit most folks anyway. Not of pride either – those don’t look good on anyone! The expectation is that each guest will wear the garment of gratitude at this “wedding banquet” by letting the kindness of God make us so new that heck, we hardly recognize ourselves! And that too is a message about “*worthiness*.”

Here’s the thing. When Christ calls a person, whether good or bad at our entry point, the entry point is not the point – because that point is not the banquet table but only the coat room. In our story, the stated change is of an outer garment, but the “change” implied, nay required is a change of heart and a change of perspective. A change of how you spend time and yes, even how you spend. Whether the world judges us to be “good” or “bad,” worthy or unworthy is frankly, not worthy of our worry. The invitation of Christ belongs to you. So honor the invitation and be loyal to the inviter. Yes, God has a jealous streak – call it passion, call it pride, but call it this way - God wants you exclusively and forever – because that is how he first loved you.

I rather doubt Leslie Gore thought much about the parable of the Wedding Banquet before she wrote her 1950’s teen hit, but I do think she hit the high notes of the story. The church, the message of salvation we possess and the witness we render in Jesus’ name is God’s party and he’ll cry if he wants to - if you are not there or you are and don’t seem to care. God, in ways we cannot adequately express is supremely grieved should “*Judy and Johnny*” Christian slip out the door or dance to their own tune. Galatians 2:20 says “*the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.*” Luther said “*do not doubt that you belong to the number of those who speak this me.*”
AMEN