

## THE INVITATION

Matthew 22:1-12

We get a postcard in the mail which says, “Save the Date.” It shows a young couple who are announcing the date of their wedding a year from now. No details—just telling us it will happen. We smile because they look happy together and we are glad that they will be married. We might have a calendar for next year handy to mark the date or put it in our date on our cell phone or stick the card in a pile with others future events.

Later we receive an email reminder. It gives us a link on the web to check details. We find the location and exact time of the wedding. Again, we are happy for them, but think more about when and where it is going to take place and the excuses come to mind about not going. “It will be too hot or cold snow then” “It is a little too far away.” “It is a busy time for me.” “I guess they will expect me to buy a present even with my tight finances.” Then we go on to other things.

Then the day comes when we get the formal invitation. Now we really have to think about our decision. Included in the mailing is our RSVP with the date when it is expected. The excuses get stronger in our minds about not going, but so also does the guilt that tell us we should go. Yet, the temptation is to put it off, hoping that time will magically make the decision easier to make later on.

As we near that date for the RSVP we hear others talk about going to the wedding. It is a reminder that time has not made the decision any easier. What should we do?

Then a decision needs to be made. It is not that it is easier to make, it is just that the pressure of a deadline forces us to do it. Guilt wins over and we accept the invitation. But that doesn’t mean we have no reluctance about going.

We get to the week of the wedding. More and more thoughts come that tell us not to go. It will pretty much eat up one of our precious weekends. Who do we really know that will be there? Do we want to pay for a gift? Do we want to sit through a reception making small talk to people we don’t really know well? Even

up to the time when we should leave for the wedding, the temptations come to stay put. It is so much more comfortable to just relax at home. The bottom line—we just don't want to go.

Jesus uses that illustration about a king who invites people to the wedding of his son. They may feel an obligation to go, but they have all kinds of other diversions—their farms, their business. They just don't want to go. In the story Jesus tells it is so extreme that they kill the servants sent to invite them. Jesus adds this detail to illustrate how the king is God and He used the prophets to invite His people, but they rejected them. What helps is for us to understand that kings would have technical control of lands far from them, but not have a lot of impact on the daily lives of the people who controlled the land. They will kill those servants because they were interfering with the priorities of those local owners. They felt they that had better things to do.

It can seem that way with God and us. We go to work or school, work hard, pay our bills, purchase our food, and stay alive. We live like most other people, so many of us could care less about God. If we have debts to pay, then we get extra work to pay it off, consolidate our debt with help from a company, or get help from our family. If it is too hot or too cold, central AC and heat solve the problem. If we get hungry, we check the fridge. If we need information, we Google it. And there is always something on a screen that can keep our attention. Who needs God? Why would we want to accept His invitation?

Then we can think about death or something else that even our modern comforts cannot handle. Perhaps then Jesus could come in handy with His promise of eternal life. But there is more to just saying it is okay. To respond to Jesus' invitation means that we follow Him. That means more than just leaving the comfort of our beds on Sunday morning to go to church. Jesus told this story in Matthew's Gospel as part of a whole section of stories spoken in the temple on the Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week. By early Friday morning He would be arrested, then hung on a cross that day. His stories reputed any attempt on the part of His enemies to discredit Him. Either people would have to accept that he is the Son of God or reject Him. Either Jesus is Lord and Master of our lives, or we are saying to Jesus, "Who needs you?"

Jesus' invitation can seem a lot better to those who lack what we have. If you are homeless, an invitation to a free meal has a lot more pull that it does to people who have a full refrigerator or a student who has enough points on a university meal plan. An invitation to a new life sounds better if you hate the one in which you live. But if we are comfortable in our climate controlled houses or apartments with our electronic devices and lots of options for food, why would we want to risk losing that? No, Jesus doesn't call us to leave our jobs, houses, and college work to follow Him. But He calls us to take risks to help other people, to give of our finances for charity, to lose our valuable time listen to others, to set aside some of our comforts to serve Him by serving others. Why would we want to accept that? That is what Jesus means by, "Many are called, but few are chosen." He is not talking about numbers, but how unobvious it would be for people to accept God's invitation, especially us with our "comfortable" lives.

In our Old Testament lesson God tells us through the prophet Isaiah:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come; buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

How can you "buy" food without money? If you get it for no money, isn't it free? What is offered is free to those who have no money, but it still comes with a cost. It still has to be paid for. Isaiah's prophecy is made in the context of God's Servant, the one who would suffer for the people. We know this Servant to be Jesus. He paid the price on the cross. God's promise can sound too good to be true. Free stuff is often junk or something attached to future costs. But God's promise is true because it cost the highest price which Jesus paid in full for us. That is exactly what it means when He said before He died, "It is finished." In other words, "It is paid in full!"

It is in that context that we receive Jesus' invitation. When we realize what He paid for it and see how it is our indifference to God and worship of the "things" in our lives that led to that, then we see His invitation in a new way. Then it trumps everything else. Then we become like the people in the streets that the king invited. Then we want to come!