

### **Exodus 32:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” <sup>2</sup>Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup>So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” <sup>5</sup>When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.” <sup>6</sup>They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup>they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” <sup>9</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. <sup>10</sup>Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup>But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup>Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup>Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” <sup>14</sup>And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

### **Psalms 106:1-6, 19-23 (UMH 829)**

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup>Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD, or declare all his praise?

<sup>3</sup>Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.

<sup>4</sup>Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people; help me when you deliver them;

<sup>5</sup>that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory in your heritage.

<sup>6</sup>Both we and our ancestors have sinned; we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.

<sup>19</sup>They made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a cast image.

<sup>20</sup>They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.

<sup>21</sup>They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,

<sup>22</sup>wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

<sup>23</sup>Therefore he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

### **Philippians 4:1-9**

<sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **Matthew 22:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.”

### **The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha**

#### **There’s Something about Marriage**

Did you all hear about the preacher who was asked to attend the 5th and 6th grade Sunday School class to talk about marriage? He started off by asking if any of the young people knew what Jesus had to say about marriage. You could tell they were all wracking their brains but couldn't think of anything. Until, finally, one little boy raised his hand and said: *"Is that when Jesus said: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."?*

If you were here in church last Sunday, you heard Carol’s sermon on one of Jesus’s parables, the

parable of the vineyard owner. Today's scripture reading from the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Matthew is another of Jesus's parables, and it comes right after the parable from last week. Not only are the parables next to each other in the Bible, but they sort of sound alike, because both are parables about the nature of the kingdom of God.

As with last week's parable, there is a cast of characters - and if you know the cast it is easier to understand the plot, and get the point of the story. This is the cast: The king throwing the wedding is God. The son getting married (v. 2) is Jesus. The invited guests that didn't show up for the wedding feast (v. 3) are the people of Israel. The first set of slaves that are sent out to gather the guests (v. 3) are the Hebrew prophets. The second and third sets of slaves (vv. 4, 8) are Christian missionaries. The burned city (v. 7) is Jerusalem. The good and bad who were invited to the wedding (v. 10) are the members of the church, which includes both righteous and unrighteous. The wedding robe (vv. 11-12) refers to righteousness.

A husband and wife were talking about an upcoming wedding and the wife said: *"It's going to one of those dollar and sense kind of weddings."* The husband asked, *"What do you mean by that?"* And she replied, *"Oh, you know. He doesn't have a dollar, and she doesn't have any sense."*

Weddings can be the most joyful time on earth but they can also be a major pain. Part of the reason is that while it is one of the happiest days of a couple's life, it's also one of the most stressful times they will ever experience.

The Reverend Billy Strayhorn tells this story about the first wedding he performed:

*I'll never forget my first wedding. It was in my very first church, a young couple by the name of Barney and Sylvia. Actually, they weren't younger than Mary and I. Now let me tell you a little bit about this Church before I tell you about the wedding. It was a little bitty country church. The whole church building, could have fit in this Sanctuary. The membership was around 60 but they had an average attendance of about 35. Usually about half of those in attendance were children because these folks took it upon themselves to pick up all the neighbor kids and bring them to Sunday School and worship.*

*There were two Sunday School rooms behind the Sanctuary and a little extension off of one side. There was no indoor plumbing but they had two of the nicest outhouses I have ever seen. And they didn't have central heat and air. Instead they had a central floor furnace in a small furnace room under the church. The three foot square grate was right at the end of the center aisle.*

*The wedding took place on a Friday night in October. It was cold that afternoon, so as soon as I got to the church, I turned on the furnace to warm up the place. Nobody told me that I should have turned it off right before the wedding.*

*Barney and Sylvia and all the families and friends showed up. The place was packed. Barney and I and the best man walked in and stood at the end of the aisle, right over the grate. The door of*

*the church opened and in came the bridesmaid and then Sylvia.*

*The door stayed open as a number of latecomers slipped in while Dad walked Sylvia down the aisle. That cool air swept across the thermostat, which of course, did it's job. I heard the furnace light but I didn't think anything about it.*

*We were all in our places, Dad had just given the Bride away and gone to sit down when the blower on the furnace kicked in. Nobody thought anything about it until Sylvia's dress started to expand. It expanded and contracted two or three times like some living thing. By this time people were giggling. Finally, it expanded until she looked like she was wearing a hoop skirt.*

*Sylvia's eyes were as big as saucers. And then it happened. With an almost audible "whoosh" her dress and slip turned inside out like an umbrella in a storm. Part of the crowd gasped, part of them burst out laughing. Sylvia and Barney were bright red with embarrassment and Sylvia was crying.*

*Barney got Sylvia a glass of cold water and I got them both calmed down. And we got the furnace turned off. After about five or ten minutes, the wedding continued. However, when we came to the exchange of rings, things went from bad to worse. You see, by this time, Barney was a nervous wreck. He was shaking so bad, that when he tried to put the ring on Sylvia's finger, he dropped the ring. It hit the grate, bounced and hit it again and then made a loud clunk as it landed on top of the furnace.*

*The same people who gasped the first time gasped again. The ones who had laughed, laughed again. Sylvia cried again. Barney nearly fainted. We finally got them both settled down. A couple of the men had tried to retrieve the ring but the furnace was still too hot. So we continued the service without it. This time, though, when we moved back to finish the ceremony, I made sure no one was standing on the grate. I pronounced them man and wife.*

*We eventually got the ring and went to the wedding reception. It turned into a real party as everybody talked and laughed about the mishaps, even Barney and Sylvia. The very next Sunday, someone brought a four foot square rug and donated it to the church. It had one purpose, to cover the furnace grate at weddings.*

*Barney and Sylvia are still married and they love to tell the story of their wedding. It is one of the most unique weddings I've ever been involved in.*

Weddings are joyous times. That's why Jesus used the imagery of a wedding so often in his teachings and in his parables. Like the one we read today. But Jesus is also using the parable to describe the Kingdom of God. He is telling us that we have been invited to a party that God is giving. Everything has been prepared and paid for, all we have to do is just show up.

Jesus has promised us eternal life in the Kingdom of God. In one of the most famous and widely

quoted versed of the Bible, John 3:16, the Apostle John says: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" We have been invited to a party that lasts forever.

For most people, the idea of eternal life is probably most closely associated with life after death; the idea that when we have died our souls will go to Heaven and we will be with God. There is an old saying that goes "*You'll get your pie in the sky when you die, by and by.*" that expresses this very idea.

But I think that this idea of eternal life starting when you die is not really accurate. I think that eternal life *really* starts when you accept Jesus as your savior. Some would say when you have been "born again." Listen to John 3:16 again: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" I don't think he is saying that we have to wait for death for eternal life to begin. For the followers of Jesus, eternal life starts now. The party is going on now, and we are invited.

Some Biblical scholars think that this scripture passage is actually two separate parables - that the last part about the man in the wedding robe is actually a separate parable. They may be on to something, because the last part about the man and the wedding robe does seem to be somewhat different than the first part. The first part seems to be directed mostly at the Pharisees and Sadducees, like the parable of the vineyard owner last week. Jesus is telling them that they are making a mistake by not paying attention to and believing what he is saying. The second part seems to be more directed at the people that Jesus is preaching to, rather than just to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In this period of time, it was the custom for people to wear special clothes to weddings - robes that were often supplied by the person giving the wedding. It was expected that the guest would wear the robe that they were given. Someone who didn't wear the robe would not only stand out like a sore thumb, but would be insulting the person who invited them.

I went to a wedding last July, the wedding of Linda's daughter Ann, and Aaron. Carol was performing the marriage, and I came along to help her, lend moral support, and enjoy the party. Everyone there was dressed for the occasion. Carol had on a beautiful white minister's robe with a blue stole. Ann was in the traditional white wedding dress and Aaron was in a black tuxedo. They made a beautiful sight standing up there together. The bridesmaids and the best men all had their outfits. The parents of the bride and groom were all dressed up and had flowers pinned to their chests. All the guests were in their good clothes, and even *I* wore a suit. And of course, all the servers at the reception were dressed in matching uniforms.

Why was everyone dressed up so nicely on a hot July evening? Why not cut-offs or T-shirts? Why not flip-flops on their feet? Well, out of respect. Respect for the occasion. Respect for God. Respect for Ann and Aaron. Respect for the people giving the party and paying the bills. And respect for each other.

In the parable, Jesus is telling us that when we show up for party, we need to be dressed for the part.

Over the years, this passage has been cited to suggest that everyone should dress up in their "Sunday Best" to go to church. Now I dress up when I come to church, and feel out of place when I am not. I dress up for the same reason that I dressed up for Ann and Aaron's wedding - respect. Respect for God, and respect for my fellow church goers.

But I don't think that this parable is talking about that. I don't think that people have to get dressed up in order to go to church, or that they should stay home if they don't have nice clothes on. I would much rather that someone show up in jeans and T-shirts and flip-flops and be a part of our service and worship God in joy rather than never darken our door. This parable is not about the garments we wear, but has everything to do with the inner garment, the garment of forgiveness and grace, the garment we are clothed in at our baptism.

Billy Strayhorn puts it this way:

*Let's put that in everyday sort of terms. In the United Methodist Church we believe in one baptism and one baptism only. We don't care how it's done, whether it's by sprinkling, pouring or immersion. It doesn't matter. And to carry that through this passage, it doesn't matter how much water is used, or how many times you've been dunked, splattered or sprayed. What matters is if it got through to your heart. You can get wet from head to foot and be physically baptized a thousand times. But if you're not baptized from the inside out; if your heart stays the same, no amount of water will save you. It's not the outer garment of baptism, the water, it is the inner garment of grace that fills the heart that makes the difference.*

*There was this one man in a particular church who wasn't very deep in his commitment to Christ but who loved to go forward when an invitation was given. Every Sunday, the preacher gave an invitation and every Sunday this guy would go forward, kneel at the altar, spread out his arms and pray loud enough for everyone in the church to hear, "Fill me, Lord Jesus, fill me."*

*Everybody knew what to expect at the end of every service. One day this church had a Revival and on the first night of the Revival the preacher gave a heartfelt invitation. Well, you can guess who was the first one down. He fell at the altar and prayed, "Fill me, Lord Jesus, fill me." But that night, from the back of the church a voice piped up and said, "Don't do it, Lord. He leaks!"*

Accepting an invitation means accepting the terms of the invitation. In spite of the problems at the beginning, we've been invited to the party. We're invited and called to put on the wedding garments of God. The inner garment of grace that fills the heart and makes the difference.

The Apostle Paul puts the same idea another way in this passage from today's Scripture reading from Phillipians:

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Amen.