

Matthew 22:1-14
October 15, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Even though it's been quite some time since I last sculpted the perfect resume in attempt to secure the perfect career that would solve all of life's problems the process itself is crystal clear in my mind. You know the routine, list all your positives. All your strengths. Why you are better than the next person? It was almost exhausting at times trying to recall things from my past that, on paper, made me look like an all-star applicant. That's what we do in life to get ahead. We are told so from an early age. In school, emphasis is placed on being in this club and that club. Fill up your schedule with all you can because this is what you will be judged on. Take all the college courses you can. It will look good on a college entrance application. It will set you apart from everyone else. I, too, find myself as a parent guilty of promoting this societal norm with my own children. We see it in political elections. We even see it in the obituaries we take so much time to craft. We list all the accomplishments we have had in life. It seems from birth to death our culture has shaped us to understand our worth is measured by how much we have done, how much we have, and how we have

succeeded in living out the American dream. These are the lenses we have been given and view life with.

These lenses, by themselves, aren't inherently wrong. Hard work is an excellent quality. The Christian life calls us to strive diligently each and every day in our calling to bear forth fruit for the kingdom. In the church of Christ there is no room for complacency. Salvation granted through Christ's death and resurrection calls for discipleship rooted in that grace. Otherwise, that grace simply becomes cheap grace.

Claiming our strengths also is not a bad thing. Congregations can do well by recognizing and giving thanks for their strengths –God-given qualities that are to be utilized to the fullest of their potential in living out the calling of doing kingdom work. It's important to note our strengths may and often will vary differently than the strengths of another congregation. Attempting to compare ourselves to another congregation and be what they are or have what they have is viewing the church through the lenses we have grown accustomed to wearing. We attempt to focus on what we don't have rather than trust in the promise of the opening words of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Or perhaps another way of wording it, "The Lord is my shepherd and provides

everything I need.” We attempt to base our worth on what another community of faith has; rather, than seeing our worth lies in the mercy of God.

Celebrating our accomplishments also is not something to be discarded. A quick search of the Bible revealed 227 times the word “Rejoice” is found and 267 times the word “joy” is found. Thus, celebrating and being a people full of joy seems to be part and parcel of the will of God for us. The problem arises when we claim those accomplishments as “our” accomplishments failing to locate the Spirit’s activity in them and then also use those accomplishments to set us above another human being, another congregation, or viewing them with the intent these accomplishments are the means of earning of God’s favor. Doing so completely nullifies the saving work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, accomplished through his death and resurrection on the cross. Jesus becomes nothing more than another political insurrectionist killed by the political machine of his day. We dismiss the very fact that salvation won through the cross of Christ and the empty tomb of Easter is for all people and it is freely given. An open invitation. Instead, we turn salvation into a commodity that can only be bought. To be sure it was bought; but, not with our works or our money or our accomplishment but rather with the blood of Christ.

I think that is what makes reading today's parable so challenging. Because we are conditioned to read it through the lenses we have been outfitted with and told are the proper lenses each and every day of our lives. These lenses lead us so often to hear the last line of the parable, "For many are called, but few are chosen" from a scarcity model that says what didn't I do? Or what don't I have? Or what more needs to be on my resume, my entrance application, and included in the story of my life? These lenses promote viewing this text and seeing a God whose love can be bought and I think they promote a mindset of fear. Fear we aren't good enough. Fear we won't get in. Fear we don't have enough. Fear of a God who will bind us hand and foot and cast us out into the outer darkness. In all reality, in doing so it is we who cast judgement upon ourselves and cause ourselves to stand apart from God when we fail to accept the invitation of sheer grace and mercy found in this text. Fail to enter into or grow more deeply into a relationship with God.

Because that is really about what this passage is about. In it we see a God continually attempting to be in relationship with God's people. We see a God inviting time and time again even when the initial invitation is rejected. We see a God who so desperately wants to celebrate the feast God has prepared and set out. We see a God extending the invitation to all people, good and bad. This

parable is indeed about the kingdom. A kingdom for all. A kingdom of grace. A kingdom in which it is not up to us, what we have, or what we do to be invited. When we view the parable through these lenses I think it gives us a much clearer image of God. We see a God of love. We see a God of relationship. We see a God of grace and mercy. We see a kingdom so differently than the kingdom the world creates that at times promotes itself as welcoming to all but in all reality often beats to the drum that only those like us are worthy to be included. The church is often a living reality of this fact. We see a kingdom in which all are clothed, not simply those who have the means to clothe themselves. Not simply the elite and powerful. Not simply those privileged because of skin color or gender. Rather, we see a kingdom in which are equal. The poor are clothed out of the grace of the king. The sick are given the same medicine for healing regardless of their position in society. No one stands above another. Viewing the parable through these lenses we no longer have to ask whether or not we are the one without a robe? We trust in the grace of this King. We are freed to not worry about being cast aside when Christ returns. We don't live out of model that says we don't have enough, we aren't good enough, or we have to do more to pad our resume.

We are freed. Freed to love God. Freed to love our neighbor. Freed to bear fruit. Freed to celebrate with the king the gracious invitation to the banquet we have been extended. Freed to partner with the king and the king's son in extending the invitation to those who may not have heard about it. Freed to join in the work of God in clothing the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and striving for justice. Freed to let go of the burden of being good enough for God. Free to receive to the free gift of God's grace and grow into the fullness of that relationship. Worship is a celebration. Let us rejoice and be glad it in! Amen.