

Sunday Sermon October 11, 2026

Weeping and gnashing of teeth. I think the weeping and gnashing spoken of in today's Gospel is also shared by preachers everywhere this weekend as we attempt to puzzle out this challenging and difficult parable. Truth be told, it might be my least favorite in all of the Gospels...

It's often read as a simple allegory. The King is God who throws a wedding banquet for His Son, Jesus. The invited guests are the religious folks, in this case the religious authorities of Jesus' time, and the Jews more broadly. The destruction of the city refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The servants who bring in "the good and the bad" are the early Christian missionaries bringing people into the church. And then there's the bit about the man being tossed out for not wearing the proper clothing.

Read this way, we have God depicted as a king with anger issues and the potential for anti-Semitism against those who refused the invitation. And we're still left with that bit about the guy being tossed out for fashion reasons. Is this really Good News?

But it's always a hazard to read a story like this as a simple allegory meant to make a single point. We want clear answers tied up with a bow, but parables often feature outrageous characters doing things that give us pause for the purpose of expanding our spiritual imaginations.

I'm going to suggest, today, that this parable is about invitation. Invitation. And that it is showing us that the invitation to be in relationship with God and to live in loving relationship with others is a gift. And that responding to the invitation is up to us.

"Tell those who have been invited" the king says "that everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." "Come" – the invitation.

A story. Though she was only five years old, she was feeling very grown up as her mother helped her get dressed. Today was a special day, her first ride on

the train so she wanted to wear her fancy pink dress and shiny black shoes. Her mother put a pretty bow in her hair and they were ready to go.

They arrived at the train station early. She was very excited. They took a place on a bench in the cavernous hall, noisy with hustle and bustle, and the little girl watched all the people hurriedly passing by.

Across from them, sitting on the floor, his back against the wall, was an old man, or at least he looked old. He had long hair under his dirty baseball cap and a grey, scraggly beard. His face and hands were dirty. He appeared to be wearing layers of clothes under a long overcoat that had a noticeable tear in the sleeve.

On the floor in front of the man was a paper cup that an occasional passerby tossed a coin or a dollar bill into, but the man didn't seem to notice. He stared blankly into space with hollow eyes that conveyed sadness.

The little girl's mother opened her purse and produced something neatly wrapped in wax paper, a peanut butter sandwich. She handed it to the little girl who was still watching the old man intently.

The girl carefully opened the wax paper. The sandwich was cut into four perfect squares. She picked one up and slowly began to eat, but before she finished that portion, she handed it to her mother, re-wrapped the remaining three and slid off the bench.

Before her mother could react, the little girl made her way through the bustling crowd. She walked up to the man and held out the sandwich. When their eyes met his blank stare turned to a shiny glimmer. His sad face revealed a toothless smile, and he reached out his hand for hers. Her mother, still watching from the distance, smiled and realized that they had both been fed. They had shared... communion."

One of the things we might wonder about in today's Gospel parable is: why didn't the invited guests come? The king was serving oxen and fat calves, for heaven's sake. Who would pass that up?

In the ancient world, and in many places in our world today, food is scarce. Many people spend much of their day just trying to secure enough food to survive.

The king is giving feast. Why would you pass that up? Maybe because you're not hungry. "They made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. . ." They couldn't be bothered. They were too busy. They were just fine in their own little worlds, satisfied with life as it was.

They felt no need to come together to feast, to connect, to be nourished. No need for communion.

Physical hunger is when there's an emptiness in our stomach. Spiritual hunger is when there's a void in our heart and our soul. And Jesus came to feed both. He gave the hungry bread for their empty stomachs, and he gave kindness and mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and love for aching hearts and souls.

A little girl hands a beggar her sandwich and she isn't just feeding his stomach. She's feeding his heart and soul with her kindness and care, and that is what he hungers for most deeply. That's what we all hunger for, knowing we are loved, that we matter to God and to others.

What inspired the little girl to do it, I wonder. What caused her to say "yes" to the invitation to the banquet of sharing her simple sandwich and her love and care with a stranger?

That guest dismissed for not wearing a wedding robe might give us some insight. For a banquet with the king the robe would have been provided. Robes would have been offered to all the guests as a gift.

The wedding robe is like the baptismal garment that is placed upon the newly baptized. It is a visible reminder that baptized life, life in Christ, means taking on a life of love and service.

We are free to accept or reject the invitation. The invitation to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself, and to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being” as our baptismal promises make clear.

In reflecting on the robe, Richard Spalding says: “Gospel living only begins with the invitation. It cannot remain a mere idea. Its absolute requirement is a transformed life. Though many have been called, the ones who are to be chosen are those who are living in a new way – who have put on life in Christ – as Paul will exhort in the letter to the Colossians:

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves – clothe yourselves -with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Jesus suggests that fruitfulness can indeed be put on like a wedding robe – or baptismal garment – so that the outward effects of gospel choices will finally settle into the hands and the heart of all who follow him.”

That’s the invitation – to be clothed. To make gospel choices that settle into our hands and hearts so that we might be more Christlike.

Amen

