

“Many are Invited, but Few Respond”

Matthew 22: 1-14

One of biggest fears that each and every host has when throwing a party is wondering if people will actually show up. Just think about. We spend all this time, planning and preparing for the party. We clean our houses from top to bottom. We plan out the menu, go buy groceries, worry that we will not have enough food so we go out and buy more. And then the day of the party comes... The house is spotless. The food is all prepared and spread out on the table. We check over the last minute details, only to discover that everything is in its place. And now we wait. The clock slowly ticks away...tick, tock. We wonder who will be the first guest.. The time that the party is supposed to get started draws nearer and we wait. And we begin to wonder: Will anyone show up? Will anyone come to our party?

We sent out the invitations. We got a few RSVPs but we know more will show up. We did the follow up calling. We reviewed the guest list before you purchased the food. As the clock ticks away the minutes, we as the host begin to wonder: Will anyone show up? Those minutes before the first guest arrives are the longest minutes in the party-giver's lives.

Will anyone show up?

That is also the question that our Scripture pushes us to answer as people of faith and as Christians. We have been given an invitation to a party, a party that celebrates the coming of the Kingdom of God. We have been given a chance to RSVP for the party of the year. And our Scripture asks us: Will we show up or will we find some excuse or offer up some reason to not attend this party, this banquet hosted by God? Will we join in the celebration or have we become so complacent in our faith that we expect the invitation, that we expect the grace, that we expect the gift, that we expect the welcome as our right, as our “reward”, as Christians and we decide that we are not obligated to do anything else in response to that invitation? Will we respond to the invitation or have we come to the point in our faith lives, in our church, on our journeys of that that we take for granted God’s grace and God’s welcome?

The real question that Jesus is posing to the crowd gathered then and the crowd gathered here today: Will we show up to the party, ready to celebrate, ready to respond to the gifts of grace and welcome, ready to be an active part in the Kingdom of God? Or will we find an excuse not to attend? Jesus is pushing us to take a hard look at just exactly how we respond to God’s invitation to come to the feast in our lives, in our churches and in our communities.

In our text this morning, Jesus is continuing his discussion with the leaders of Israel in the temple just days after he has entered the city triumphantly and just days before he is crucified. And he shares with them one more parable about the Kingdom of God. He says that it is like a wedding banquet given by a great King who has invited the community to come and partake. The King has gone to great lengths to prepare for this great wedding banquet and on the day of the wedding, this king sends out his servants to bring in those who have been invited to the party.

However, it soon becomes obvious that no one is coming. The clock ticks away the minutes as the king wonders if anyone will show up and partake, if anyone will come and join in the celebration, if anyone will come to the party.

So the King sends out the servants once more, telling them to say: Look, I have got all this food. I have prepared all week for this party. Everything is ready. I want you to come to the party! I want your response!

But the servants come back and let the king know that his friends, his neighbors, the very people whom he invited, the very people whom expected to be invited to this celebration are too busy to attend. They had to take care of the farm. They had to take care of their business. They were washing their hair. It just wasn't

a good time for them. Thanks for the invite, but they were unable to make it. They would just have to take a rain check on the party.

Needless to say the king is angry and goes out and destroys the city. He goes out and he burns the city to the ground.

And then the king comes back and says, “We are having a party today. I don’t care who you bring to it. Just bring in people to the party! I don’t care if they are good people or bad people. Just bring them in! I am throwing a party today and we need people! We are having a celebration. We are having a party today!”

So the slaves go out and grab anyone that they could find and bring them back to the party. And just when the party gets started, the King realizes that a gentleman decides to show up and not dress properly. So the King throws him out!

And we as readers ask ourselves, “What more does this King want? The guy showed up, didn’t he? This is more than the first group did! He at least showed up! What more does the King want?”

And Jesus answers us as people of faith by saying that, “What the king wants more than anything is a proper response to the invitation. It is not enough just to show up when we are invited. There are certain expectations and behaviors that one follows when one attends a party. You don’t just come to a wedding feast

in clothes that you worked outside in all day. You don't just show up to a wedding feast in any old thing.

As a guest, you prepare to go to the party. We make sure that our clothes are clean. We make sure that we have a gift to bring with us. We make sure that we mind our manners. As a guest, it is not enough just to show up to the party. As a guest, it takes some action and planning on our part to attend the party as well.

And that is what Jesus is sharing with us today. He wants us to struggle with our response to the invitation. He wants us to know that the invitation calls us to live our lives with integrity. The invitation calls us to let our lives express whose we are. The invitation calls us to think beyond just accepting our place at the table to really think about what it means that our God loves us so much that God purposefully saved us a place at the table and how do we respond to such wonderful news? We have a place at the table for us, reserved for us, and the question is Will we even show up? Will we prepare to go to the party? How will we response to the invitation to join in the celebration of the Kingdom of God?

Jesus is reminding us that as people of faith, as Christians, there are some certain expectations and behaviors that are anticipated from us when we accept the invitation to the celebration of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is reminding us that yes, "all are invited to the feast at God's table, but not every response is acceptable. We

are called as [people of faith as Christians to prepare ourselves] for the party not because we have to but because we are entering into the presence of a gracious and forgiving God.”

“This parable provides an opportunity for us to take our faith seriously. As people of faith, we must realize that an invitation has been extended to us through God’s grace and God’s welcome, and we are expected to respond the right way.”

This parable provides an opportunity for us to struggle with the question “Have we become complacent in our faith, complacent in our mission as disciples of Christ, complacent in our work to bring about the Kingdom of God?”

This parable asks us the hard question: How will we respond to the invitation? Will we even show up? Will we fulfill the expectations as people of faith if we do show up? Or will come up with some excuse not to attend?

This parable reminds us that the gifts of grace, the gifts of welcome, and the gifts of invitation are freely given and we have the choice to receive or reject them as people of faith. However, we can’t be surprised when there is judgment or disappointment from God if we reject abuse or become complacent about the gifts. And we can’t be surprised that there is a chance that we will be asked to leave the party if we believe that God’s love carries with it no desire or response from us as people of faith.

This parable reminds us that “God’s grace is amazing but so is God’s desire for our response.” The simple fact is that this parable reminds us that we are called to be who we are, to let our lives express and reflect God’s love. “otherwise, we are as welcome at the table as termites and about as useful”.

The good news is that We have been given an invitation to the feast. We have been given an invitation to come to the party that celebrates the Kingdom of God.

The even better news is that today, as we gather here and celebrate this invitation, we are being shaken up and pushed out of comfort zones. We just been told that the Kingdom of God has come near for us. And now the real question is: How will we respond? Will we come to the party with the right attitude, exhibiting the right behavior, in the proper of attire of spiritual growth and spiritual disciplines? Or will we find some excuse not to attend at all? Grace is not a privilege. It is a gift that calls us to respond with thanksgiving. It is a gift that calls us to respond with praise. It is a gift that calls us to respond with integrity. It is a gift that calls us to respond with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with our souls. It is a gift that calls us to respond with our lives.

May we respond to the gifts of God’s grace and welcome as people of faith with our very beings and our lives. Amen.