



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity, October 17th, 2010

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Today's Gospel – the Parable of the Wedding Feast – is from St. Matthew's account of the last week of Jesus' earthly life: a time in which he was acutely aware that he had only few days left to prepare his disciples for the trials that lay ahead.

It's logical to assume that, because of his awareness of his impending crucifixion, he made the best possible use of the short time he had left: that he crammed into this final week of teaching the concentrated essence of his Gospel. Certainly, this is what St. John believed. More than half of his Gospel is devoted to the events of that week.

Christians, therefore, ought to pay special attention to Jesus words and actions in the final week of his earthly life. Everything he said and did is likely to be vitally relevant to our salvation. And here in America at the start of the third Christian millennium, this presents some serious problems. Much that Christ had to say was utterly out of keeping with the spirit of our age – none more so than the Parable of the Wedding Feast.

If anything is politically incorrect, it is this parable. It is entirely out of tune with the philosophy espoused by a majority of our cognitive elite (a posh way of saying opinion makers and politicians). It portrays God as "punitive" and "judgmental" – behavior we, from kindergarten up, have been taught to regard as primitive; barbaric, even.

If this parable is to be believed, God is like a king who sends out his armies to slaughter and destroy anybody who fails to comply with his slightest whim. He even consigns to everlasting torment a poor soul who turns up at his son's wedding in a

sweat suit and sneakers. How can one respect a God who behaves like this? Surely God can't be worse than we are?

Before we set off down this road, it's worth remembering the proverb: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." And, indeed, this saying applies in spades to the history of the past century. A vast majority of our leaders (including such awful folks as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and the Brothers Castro) have been striving to do God's job for him – striving to build heaven on earth. Yet for all their aspirations, noble and ignoble, their efforts have caused more human misery than in any other era of human existence. T

This is not a political broadcast. My sole point is that with this sort of record in mind, it might be well worth listening to what Jesus has to say – about our selves and about God.

And the first insight he shares with us in the Parable of the Wedding Feast is nobody enjoys acknowledging God's authority. Even when God orders us to do something really nice – like come to a wedding – many of us resent it and dig in our heels.

One reason for this, says Jesus, is our obsession with material possessions. If we don't watch out, we can get so wrapped up in things we imagine are enjoyable, we reject God when he tries to warn us many of the things we like doing will actually do us harm.

Sometimes we ignore God's warnings by pretending he hasn't said what the Bible tells us he has said. And quite often we twist his words to mean what

we would like them to mean rather the way he actually meant them. Sometimes we actually invoke his own laws to defeat his purposes. Folks who in another version of this parable, attended to the farms and their business undoubtedly invoked Levitical laws allowing them to do so.

Others ignore God's warnings by claiming he doesn't exist. That's what Jesus means by killing the messenger. To be sure, people who style themselves atheists and agnostics are going to find themselves in serious trouble. But the main point of the parable is that many folks who claim to be Christian are going to be in hot water, too.

There are an awful lot of people who think they are Christians, but who really aren't Christian at all. These are the people who reject the image of God revealed to us in The Bible. The Scriptures portray God as infinitely large and infinitely powerful; infinitely wise and infinitely good; infinitely just and infinitely loving. In fact, the Scriptures tells us, God created heaven and earth and everything in them, and that he is our sovereign Lord, and that all mankind owes fealty and obedience to him.

Many people who claim to be Christian find this concept of God awfully primitive and unsophisticated. Indeed, they really find this notion of a God of limitless powers quite comical. They believe God is really rather limited, at least they don't think that he is able to exert much influence on the world he created (if he did, in deed, create it).

They don't for example think he can break any of the scientific rules he set up for the world to run by. He cannot intervene in the law of nature, for example, to part the waters of the seas. He cannot generate life spontaneously. He certainly can't bring something that's dead back to life. And all these things are quite impossible, they say, because God, in their view, is part of nature, or the whole of nature, but he is not (absolutely not) the Absolute Lord and Master of it.

Such views and the Godhead revealed in the Scriptural record are quite incompatible. They stand at opposite ends of the theological spectrum. "Christians" who reject the God of the Bible are Christian only to the extent that they venerate the memory of a dead human being who is known to the world as Jesus Christ. They don't believe that

Jesus is the Son of God, except to the degree that any human being could be described as a Son of God. They regard Jesus merely as an exceptionally gifted teacher of ethics.

Indeed, their acknowledgment of the ethical debt that the world owes Jesus Christ is the only point upon which they agree with the Scripture. The truth of the matter is that such beliefs are entirely alien to Christianity and Jesus emphasizes this fact in the Parable of the Wedding Feast.

Either you come to the Wedding Feast – in other words, you buy the whole package and acknowledge the sovereignty of God and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord and Saviour – or you do not. No half measures are acceptable.

Buying the "whole package" is not merely a matter of intellectual assent. The case of the guy in the sweat suit and sneakers makes that plain. He is clearly surprised to learn his outfit doesn't meet God's dress code. But, sad to relate, the guy in the sweats represents, figuratively speaking, a whole lot of folks who to all essential elements of the faith: the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and salvation by Grace alone, but who fail to act upon that faith.

What Jesus is telling us is that unless we act upon the faith we profess -- unless allow the Holy Spirit into our lives -- we will fall short. In other words, if our faith yields no fruit, we will find ourselves in a similar fix to people who reject God entirely. This is really rather frightening. How can we be sure that we are meeting God's standards? Where should we begin?

The answer is found in a passage of scripture appointed to be read at today's Morning Office, *St. John 13: 34 & 35*: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this all men shall know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." It is a passage worth cultivating as the animating principle of our live. For as St. Peter tells us (*I Peter 4:8*) love will cover a multitude of sins. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.