

*Texts: Matthew 22:1-14*

*Subject: The Wedding Banquet*

*Theme: God Extends an Invitation*

*Third Sunday in Lent; March 24, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

Once I was hired to work for CBS Radio - I knew my career was on the right path. I was able to start off with some training, and would be paid at least for a few months until I could help score some advertising contracts on my own, then transitioning to being paid on commission. I got to know the station, since pop music was not really my first choice at the time. I learned more about Las Vegas. I would drive around town most days looking for new businesses opening up, and in 2004 there were new businesses popping up every day. I would get a list of new businesses licenses from Clark County, and just start calling, setting up appointments. I'd drop in unannounced to restaurants, offices, and stores, introducing myself and trying to get a foot in the door. Because I was one of the younger salespeople on the team, my boss recommended me to meet with a new nightclub that was opening at the Treasure Island Hotel. It became my first big local account, and each week, our radio host would broadcast live from the club. I became known as the nightclub guy, and as new clubs opened, they would call me to advertise. I was doing well. There was even a country bar that was interested in working with us, but my supervisor chose not to return the call - we didn't play country music. Why would they want to be on our station?

A few months went by, and the club owner kept calling. Finally, my boss and I went to meet with the guy. It was clear that the club will filled each Thursday night with college students, and locals, and the fit was right for our audience. Stoney's Rockin'

Country became one of my biggest clients, and if we had never returned the call, I may not be here today.

Stoney's was the place to be in Las Vegas on Thursday evenings - it didn't matter if you were a country fan or not! My friends and I would go there - it was hard work for me, of course. They went on to hold another locals night on Sundays and then opened another club in the North part of town, where I helped book local bands, launched new local parties, and helped to build up the business. Largely because of our work together, I had the opportunity to buy our first home, we paid off debts, started a family, and were able to give to our church. It wasn't always easy, as the economy was changing, and after a couple years, we left to go to seminary.

Greg Carey, professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary writes that, "Lent is a season of opportunity." We may use these 6 weeks to take advantage of the opportunity to turn from our selves, to be intentional about prayer and worship, to study God's Word together, to give and to serve. It may just be an opportunity to reflect on the life of Jesus, and to prepare to hear again the story of Jesus' death and resurrection in a new way.

Jesus' first hearers thought they knew the story - they were waiting for a messiah to set things right - to destroy the powers of oppression and those who ruled to bring about victory and fulfill the promise to Israel as God's chosen people. Jesus tells this story about a King who throws a great wedding feast - a big event to which the ones invited failed to show up. They weren't against partying - they just had business to do. They had farms to care for. They had families. They went about their business. They missed an opportunity. Others reacted violently - they refused and killed the

messengers. The story might lead us to question a few things - like Why? What's wrong with this picture? This is the banquet of a King! Who doesn't want in?

Is it because attending places a requirement of certain behavior? Perhaps those who respond to the invitation may have certain expectations placed on them, they would need to act responsibly, to be careful not to offend the host. Were they unprepared? The tradition of wedding banquets in Jesus time follows this pattern - the wedding date was set, and the people in the town or village would know about it - maybe they got a "save the date" announcement. Then, when the event was ready, the tables were prepared, and it was the hour of the feast, servants would be sent out to let the people know it was time to come. This was how it worked. Why would you want to miss out on that?

But aren't we the same? We get busy with work, family, entertainment, and there seem to plenty of things we'd rather do than to pray, study the Bible, worship, give, or serve. Fast? No thanks. Certainly we should not neglect our work or family - things have to get done too. But there are plenty of us who could find reasons not to come to church, not to participate in ministry, or not to get involved in the whole Jesus movement at all. For a time for me, it was making money. I wanted to do well in business, it was on my list of goals. I wanted to work hard and be paid what I was worth. That's why working on commission was a pretty good fit for a while. I didn't like nightclubs. I am not a dancer. Just not my thing. But that's where the money was.

If you work hard all week, even Saturdays, or in Las Vegas - work weekends, waking up early Sunday morning for a lecture and some coffee with friends might not be top of the list. Should we be surprised that fewer and fewer people choose to wander into sanctuaries weekly?

But what would we miss?

God's invitation is to something more than entertaining. God extends an invitation to come and die, to give our lives, to live for others, to serve the least and the last, the dirty and disturbing, hurt, angry, and broken creations all around us. God extends an invitation to visit hospitals, clean toilets, do taxes, bake bread, teach children, buy diapers, listen more, give more, and sometimes take on more than we think we can bear because it lifts up someone else. God extends an invitation to find ourselves at the foot of a cross where our fears and pain and faults are laid and paid by Jesus blood. This is the feast we are invited to - and it *is* strange and confusing at times, and maybe it doesn't always seem on the surface to be as rewarding as brunch or cocktails or sleeping in or the New York Times, or Disneyland, but this is the life - these are ways that the Living Word calls us away from the selfishness that still clings to us.

Oh but the feast is good too! It's so good that we are called to come and party! To rejoice for God's forgiveness! To touch the waters of baptism, and taste the bread and wine, and hear the organ play, and the babies shout, and the people sing! To give thanks and shout Alleluia! Yes I said it!

To sing the songs and hear the words that are salvation

- this is my body - this is my blood - it is *for you*.

God extends an invitation to ALL of us out of pure love and grace. We don't deserve to set foot in the door of the King's feast. So we go and invite others, and it might be hard for them to hear. We know there are confusing parts of the Bible, and we don't have all the answers - at least I don't. I struggle with the right words to say up here every week, and *this* sermon may not be what moves someone to give their life away

and come join the party - but maybe my life is the sermon that sings of the grace of God for someone. And maybe I *can* invite them to come and see something new or hear something that grabs a hold of them and won't let go. Maybe putting one foot in front of the other to serve a meal, to grill some burgers, to host a party, to welcome someone who felt unable to join in before - maybe *that* lets people know this celebration is for them too. And they'll show up dressed and ready to go.

If we show up and aren't ready to throw down and boogie, the party's gonna be a real downer. Let's put on that party dress and join the feast. Now is the time. Everything is ready.