



**THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
OCTOBER 11, 2020  
MATTHEW 22: 1-14  
A FOOT IN BOTH WORLDS**

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So, go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So, the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

**SERMON**

For my first eighteen years on earth, my father was a history teacher, assistant principal, or principal. In fact, he had been assistant principal where I later attended high school.

That was a horror show. Half the teachers knew dad personally from working with him and the other half by reputation.



So it was that all through my school years, dad would remind me that whatever trouble I got in at school I would get double when I got home.

Now fear can be a great motivator. What it did was make me conscious of my actions. I had to stay aware.

The opposite of being conscious—being aware—is being unconscious—remaining unaware.

Simply put, being unconscious we don't know what at we don't know.

Or what can be critical, we forget what we need to know.

With this conscious/unconscious dichotomy in mind, let's reflect on our parable.

Jesus begins, "the kingdom of heaven is like...."

This phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," can be confusing. The moment we hear the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" we may mistakenly conclude that Jesus is speaking of the life to come.

If so, we are unconscious because Jesus' first sermon, recorded in the book of mark, is that the kingdom of heaven—and here the new testament Greek is ambiguous—the kingdom of heaven is falling on you; in the midst of you—even within you.

Jesus is not speaking of a future life, but of a spiritual reality that functions in our midst.

And the basic question for us is "are we conscious or unconscious if this kingdom?"

Carl Jung wrote that "the reason why consciousness exists, and why there is an urge to widen and deepen it, is very simple: without consciousness things go less well."

The more we expand our consciousness the better life goes. This is why it's critical to continue our personal growth.

In this regard, we all face two challenges every day: first, can we get out of bed and put our feet on the floor.

Sleep is a form of being unconscious. The pull to go to bed at night is a pull toward unconsciousness. We're tired. It's been a long day. Our ego is running out of steam. Snuggling into those blankets feels so good.



And so, in the morning, unconsciousness tries to pull us back to sleep. It an act of consciousness to sit up and put our feet to the floor.

And then, second, can we face the day without fear? Can we head out and meet the day consciously, or will we shrink back in fear, which often means denial, right?

Let's see, if we can deny the reality of COVID 19 then we have nothing to fear, right? We can whistle through the graveyard.

But if we stay aware, we know we have to approach the day consciously. Let's see, do I have my mask? Do I have hand sanitizer? Will we remember not to hug that old friend when we meet? Will we wash our hands after grocery shopping? Will we take off our shoes when we come home?

Being conscious is a pain in the rear end!

It is a psychological burden to remain aware. To be conscious takes energy, focus, discipline....

When I was working as a psychotherapist, I noticed that my clients would start to yawn and feel sleepy whenever we started getting close to some highly charged psychological material. There was a pull to fall back into unconsciousness.

And this is what we see in our parable.

Just as there are physical facts that we cannot ignore, there are also spiritual facts that must be taken into consideration. We must learn to live with a foot in both worlds: the physical world and the spiritual world.

Bidden or not, God is present. The reality of God has nothing to do with our belief or lack of belief. God is present. Here and now.

This led Lutheran theologians to state that we can do nothing for our salvation and everything for our damnation.

We see this spiritual truth operating in the parable. We have a generous king, who is preparing a wedding banquet for his guests.

In the day, the king would first issue what was essentially a save-the-date notification to his guests. The wedding banquet is in two months.



A second notification was sent when the meal was actually prepared. With the second notification came a set of wedding clothes that the guests were expected to wear.

This is a generous king. A generous invitation: free food and drink. A new wedding outfit.

But these first invited guests are clearly too busy and too content with the outer world to respond to an invitation from the spiritual world.

This is why success, material possessions, wealth, a comfortable life can be so spiritually dangerous.

When all is going well, it becomes difficult to consider the spiritual world.

If we are self-sufficient, we have no need for the spiritual world of the kingdom of heaven....

Having been rebuked by the first round of guests, in Luke's version of this parable, the king sends his servants out to bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Here's the spiritual reality: those of us who have badly hurt, wounded by life, have had life fall apart, have experienced tragedy and trauma, we are cracked open and eager for the invitation into spiritual reality.

The ego is a funny thing. We need to develop a strong ego so that we can make a life for ourselves and others. And yet, paradoxically, this strong ego has to experience hardship in order to become vulnerable and open to the kingdom of God.

This "getting nailed by life" is the crucial step in becoming conscious. When we fall, we become open to becoming conscious of the presence of God in our midst....

My best friend, now deceased, was a tough ex-marine who fought in Vietnam. He had no need for God because he had survived Vietnam, had come back and, after managing a trucking company, went out on his own and started his own trucking company which was very successful. He had built a big house out in the country, living high on the hog until one day he was hospitalized due to heart problems traced to his exposure to agent orange.

He walked into church one morning and we talked. I asked him why he didn't call me when he went into the hospital. He felt he didn't deserve any care because he had turned his back on God long ago. But now his eyes had been opened. He was suddenly away of his mortality. His self-sufficiency had crumbled.



He began developing a spiritual life, got involved in the congregation and used his wealth to start and support various ministries in the congregation. He was still tough as nails, but his spiritual heart was now awakened....

When we have a foot in the spiritual world, then it will unfold in the physical world. The world unfolds in and through our choices.

Think of the world as a mirror. Empty in itself. It can only reflect back to us the values we show it.

So, every day, we are faced with whether we meet this moment with kindness or with cruelty, with love or fear, with generosity or scarcity, with a joyous heart or an embittered heart.

When we choose kindness, love, generosity and joy, then we discover in our choices the kingdom of heaven. We tap into spiritual reality and the presence of the spirit of God.

When we choose cruelty, fear, scarcity, and bitterness, we discover the hellish states of mind of which all religions speak....

And what are we to make of this one guest who shows up without his wedding garment?

One of the reasons I value depth psychology is that it gives us a lens by which to understand the gospel in all its brilliance.

Jesus was a master at understanding the human heart and soul, both in their preciousness and their ugly distortions.

We have before us this man who shows up without his wedding clothes—and let's remember that the wedding clothes had been sent to him prior to the wedding.

Here we have an example of the narcissistic personality who dominates our landscape today.

There are three main characteristics to the narcissist: grandiosity, entitlement, and lack of empathy.

It is revealing that this man is left speechless when asked why he has no wedding garment,

Of course, he's speechless. The rules do not apply to narcissists. They are special. They are entitled. Wedding clothes, me? Why would I wear what everyone else is wearing? Why would



I observe the rules? Rules are for those other people. And why would I listen to the king. If anyone told the truth, they would know I am better than the king.

You can spot the narcissists in their language. Everything is the best, the most wonderful, unbelievable, without precedent.

And, since they are secretly the most wonderful, they deserve special treatment.

Think of entire congregations where no one is wearing a mask. Why? “because we’re covered in the blood of Jesus. Hallelujah!”

How grandiose is this? How special! How different from ordinary people.

Because narcissists see themselves as the be-all-and-end-all, they are unable to put themselves in someone’s else’s shoes.

You tell a narcissist about your struggles and before you know it, they’re telling you about their struggles.

You’re sad? They cried for three hours last night. You’re worried about a medical procedure? They give you a two-hour medical history.

What is sad is that narcissistic personality traits are really compensating for feelings of emptiness and unworthiness.

The more someone talks about how wonderful, blessed, and special they are, the greater the inner emptiness....

When we violate the ways of the spiritual world, we are gripped by the forces and darkness of the unconscious. In our refusal to grow in consciousness and awareness of spiritual facts, we find ourselves in a world of trouble.

So, let’s end where we began. The king invites us into the kingdom of heaven, a present-day spiritual reality. All are invited. We are surrounded by the grace and love of the kingdom of heaven. We can do nothing for our salvation, meaning that it is all freely given. This day and every day.

But we can, in our narcissism, in our attention to worldly things, choose not to participate. We have our good excuses. We have our objections. We have our questions. We have our pride. We don’t have time for attending the wedding feast.



Yet the invitation is always before us.

The invitation is always in front of us. But will we participate?

Many are called. Few are chosen.

But you are now aware. The kingdom of heaven surrounds us.

And there are guidelines in this spiritual reality.

As we return to worship, let our worship be the first step. Every one of us, let us find ways to make real the values of the kingdom: kindness, love, generosity, and joy.

Participate. The kingdom needs you.

### **SERMON SONG**

Losing My Religion (REM)