

1 Today's sermon is called, "Yes!"

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3 Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 22 verses 1 to 14.

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5 Starting at verse 1:

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7 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables:

8 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.
9 He sent out his slaves to summon those invited to the banquet, but they didn't want to come.

10 Again, he sent out other slaves, and said, 'Tell those who are invited: Look, I've prepared my dinner; my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

11 "But they paid no attention and went away, one to his own farm, another to his business.
12 And the others seized his slaves, treated them outrageously and killed them.

13 The king was enraged, so he sent out his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned down their city.

14 "Then he told his slaves, 'The banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.

15 Therefore go to where the roads exit the city and invite everyone you find to the banquet.'

16 So those slaves went out on the roads and gathered everyone they found, both evil and good. The wedding banquet was filled with guests.

17 But when the king came in to view the guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed for a wedding.

18 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

19 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

20 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

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22 May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His Word!

23 Did you ever accept an invitation to a wedding and then fail to attend? It happens. The invitations come out weeks or months in advance, and we are happy to put our name on the guest list. Then things come up. We have to schedule a business trip that we had not expected. Someone in the family gets sick, and we have to re-think our plans. It isn't a nice thing to do--to accept an invitation and then fail to attend--but sometimes it can't be helped.

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25 It would be even more troublesome if the bride were the President's daughter and you managed to get an A-list invitation. Everyone would want to go--the President's cabinet--Senators--Representatives--reporters--social climbers--politicians. There would be no hotter ticket in town than an invitation to a White House wedding. How rude it would be to accept an invitation and then fail to show!

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27 But the worst would be a bride or groom who got cold feet at the last moment. You probably think that happens only in the movies, but I have seen it happen. I was officiating. We all gathered at the church ahead of time. The bride and her attendants were dressing in the lounge. The ushers were showing people to their seats. The best man was trying to remember what he was supposed to do. The parents were trying to stay calm. The organ was playing.

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29 Then, at some point, someone told me that nobody had seen the groom. I can't remember now who called the groom's house, but the word came back that he had changed his mind. He wasn't coming. We informed the bride, who called and got the same message.

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31 Finally, I got in my car and drove to the groom's house. He hadn't shaved. His clothes were a mess. He didn't have much to say. He just couldn't do it. I glanced at my watch now and then and saw the time for the wedding come and go. Finally I went to the church and announced that the wedding was cancelled. Then I sat with the bride as she tried to process what had happened.

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33 All that took place on Saturday. On Sunday morning, the bride's father brought pastries to our coffee hour--leftovers from the cancelled reception. He said that we might as well enjoy them, since they couldn't be used for their original purpose. It was a nice thought, but there was no joy in the coffee hour that day. It didn't matter that the pastries were better than usual. They seemed flat--all the joy had evaporated out of them. What a sad weekend!

35 Something almost that terrible happened in our Gospel story today. A king's son was getting married, so the king invited people. They accepted the invitation, and the family began to prepare for the wedding. When the time came, the king sent servants to remind people to come, but they refused to come. He sent the servants again, and again the invitees refused to come. Some of them just went about their usual business, but others abused the servants. The king was enraged, and sent soldiers to punish the people who had abused his servants.

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37 Now the king had a big wedding but no guests, so he sent his servants to the highways and byways to invite anyone and everyone to the son's wedding. They invited perfect strangers. There were all sorts of people there--good and bad

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39 But then the king came and found a man without a wedding robe. We don't know how this man would have obtained a wedding robe--presumably the king had made festive garments available--but this man had refused to wear one. The king had his servants throw the man out into the outer darkness, "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Pretty harsh!

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41 But, of course, there's a story behind the story. The story of the king and the reluctant wedding guests is an allegory--a story where each of the elements stands for something else--has a symbolic meaning.

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43 • The king is God.

44 • The son is Jesus.

45 • The reluctant invitees are the Jewish people.

46 • The servants bearing the invitations are the prophets.

47 • The last minute invitees are Gentiles.

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49 It's three stories in one:

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51 • First it's the story of a king who invited his subjects to his son's wedding. They accepted the invitation. Why not! The wedding was to be sometime in the future, and it was no problem to agree to attend. Besides, it was an honor!

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53 But when the day came, that was something else again. The people had fields to plow--and dinner to cook--and babies to diaper--and lawns to mow. They had a thousand other things to do, and suddenly it didn't seem so wonderful to drop everything and go to the king's wedding. It didn't seem so wonderful now that they were faced with buying a new dress--and sending their suit to the cleaners--and reshuffling their schedule--and putting off their vacation. And so they didn't go. Simple as that!

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55 The invitation was wonderful in principle but, once they were faced with the gritty realities, it didn't seem so wonderful anymore.

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57 • Second, it's the story of the Jewish people--God's chosen people. God told Abram:

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59 "I will make of you a great nation.

60 I will bless you and make your name great.

61 You will be a blessing....

62 All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you." (Genesis 12:2-3).

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64 Great! We like to receive blessings--and we are happy enough to be a blessing to others. But later, when they had to deal with the realities behind the blessing, the Israelites weren't so pleased anymore. Rescued from Egypt, they bumped up against the Red Sea. They couldn't move forward because of the water--and they couldn't move backward because of the Egyptian army--so they complained to Moses--and to God. They said:

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66 "Because there were no graves in Egypt,

67 have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?

68 Why have you treated us this way, to bring us out of Egypt?

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70 Isn't this the word that we spoke to you in Egypt,

71 saying, 'Leave us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?'

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73 For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians,

74 than that we should die in the wilderness." (Exodus 14:11-12).

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76 The invitation was wonderful in principle but, once they were faced with the gritty

realities, it didn't seem so wonderful anymore.

• And, third, it is our story too. God calls us to be his children, and we say, YES! Isn't it wonderful to be a child of the King!

And God says, I will save you from your sins, and we say, YES! Let's put those sins behind us!

And God says, I will bless you--and I will bless those who bless you--and I will make you a blessing--and we say YES! I just love to receive blessings--and I'm happy to know that God will bless me--and others too! YES!

And God says, Pray for healing--physical healing and spiritual healing--wholeness. And we say, YES! Let's hear it for healing!

And God says, I would like for you to teach a Sunday school class. And we say, WHAT! SAY AGAIN!

And God says, I would like for you to teach a Sunday school class. And we say, Well, let me explain my situation, Lord. I am not all that good a teacher, actually--and I am pretty busy right now--and I don't really like being around children all that much. I can't see that it's going to work out for me to be a Sunday school teacher.

And God says, I would like for you to serve on the church board. And we say, Well, there's a little problem, Lord. You see, the board meets every third Thursday night, and my bowling league bowls on Thursday nights. You know that I want to do what I can--that I want to serve you faithfully--that I want to be a good disciple--but I was just wondering if we could find a better fit. I don't think that Thursdays are going to work for me.

And God says, I would like for you to work with the youth group. And we say, Lord, you remember what I had to say about Sunday school! Ditto with youth groups!

And God says, I would like for you to tithe. And we say, Lord, you've got to be kidding! Have you seen my bills? Do you have any idea what it takes to put food on the table? And then there's my mortgage! And taxes! I could probably tithe if I didn't have to pay taxes! But perhaps we can work something out. If you would persuade my boss to give me a big raise, then perhaps I could tithe. Maybe!

And God says, I would like to you to be sexually abstinent until marriage. And we say, Lord, I think that I can prove to you that that's medically impossible!

And God says, I would like to you to be faithful to your husband or wife. And we say, Oh that sounds like a good idea--but I hope you aren't going to hold me to a "Zero-Defects" standard--nobody's perfect, you know!

And God says, I would like for you to invite your neighbor to church. And we say, Oh, I would find that pretty embarrassing, actually. My neighbor doesn't seem like the kind of person who would be "into" religion all that much. And I think that, if he feels a need for religion, he should probably go in the direction that his heart leads him.

And God says, I would like for you to teach your children the great stories from the Bible--I really want them to know the Bible. And we say, Well, actually, Lord, we aren't doing it exactly that way, but we are giving our children religious instruction. We read stories to them from the Dr. Seuss every night, and there are some good lessons in there!

The invitation to be a Christian was wonderful in principle but, once we're faced with the gritty realities, it doesn't seem so wonderful anymore.

But this parable reminds us that God expects more than lip service from us. God expects us to accept the invitation--and to attend the wedding. God expects us to publicly acknowledge Jesus as our Savior--and then to let Jesus make a difference in our lives. God expects us to have faith so that we might be saved--and then God expects us to live like saved people.

And there's a zinger at the end of the parable for those who refuse to become disciples in fact--and not just in principle. God destroys their city. God has them bound hand

and foot and thrown into the outer darkness. Let us not be among those who accept the invitation but fail to show. Let us not be among those who disappoint the Lord.

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111 Most of us have already accepted the Lord's invitation to the joyous party. Most of us are aware that real discipleship gets gritty--requires us to change in ways that we don't want to change--requires us to give things that we don't want to give--requires us to do things that we don't want to do.

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113 But our sacrificial discipleship opens the door to the joyous party. When the Lord calls us to live faithful lives, let us SAY YES! And then let us DO YES! When we both SAY and DO YES, we should bring a big bucket, because the Lord will cause our cup to run over with blessings.

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115 This is the word of the Lord.

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117 Thank you for watching and listening! We will see you all next week!

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