

October 15, 2023

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king

said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Very often Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet is seen as an attack on the leaders of the synagogue and maybe even the people of Israel. These leaders are the ones who have been invited to take part in God’s banquet, but they are too busy to attend. In fact, some even ridicule and mistreat those who bring God’s invitation. The parable tells us that not only are those who choose to ignore God’s invitation dis-invited, they suffer dire consequences for their shunning of God’s banquet. It gets worse. Even some who are accepted the invitation do not follow the rules and they too suffer from their lack of respect.

This is not an easy parable. (Are any of the parables easy?) After much soul searching I feel I am beginning to understand it. I have read that wedding guests were provided with appropriate wedding robes. So, if a guest was not wearing one, then that person had made a decision to forgo the appropriate attire. Thus, like the other, too

busy invitees, the guest suffered the consequences of ignoring the host's directions.

When I first read this parable years ago, I assumed the wedding banquet was to be seen as gathering at a church building on Sunday mornings and worshipping God. I no longer associate the parable's banquet with Sunday mornings. The banquet is nothing more and nothing less than life itself. God's invitation, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, is an invitation to live life to its fullest. One does this by putting on the banquet robe.

This robe isn't fancy clothes. It is a way of living life, of choosing how to live life. When we choose to live life on our terms, under our presumed control, we are refusing God's invitation to put on the banquet robe; we become like those who "made light of [the invitation] and went away, one to his farm, another to his business." We are turning ourselves away from God. We do so at our own peril, according to the parable.

Putting on the banquet robe begins with our own willingness to choose to live life on God's terms. Living "on God's terms" begins with an awareness that we have little control over life and are dependent on God's grace. This does not mean we are helpless or that we are to be

passive in how we live our lives, rather we are to be mindful of how we live. By mindful I mean we are to try to live by Jesus' example; we are to follow in the Way of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul was referring to this mindfulness when he wrote to the church in Philippi: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ... Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

This is good advice in these very uneasy, disturbing times. The world seems – literally – to be blowing up. Hatred and anger are leading to violence, to evil acts of vengeance. I was recently asked, "What are we to do? How can we stop this?" They said, "I feel so helpless, if not hopeless." My response – I hope – was similar to what Paul wrote in: "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me."

"Think about these things."

When life hits us hard; when we worry about our children or another family member; when we are rushing around, feeling pressured, and there doesn't seem to be any end to the violence, then "think about these things." Think about God. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known."

Strive for whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, look for excellence and for anything praiseworthy. These are the things that count in life. "Think about these things." And then, put them on so that others might experience these things through you. This is the putting on of God's banquet robe.

God is continually, unceasingly, unconditionally inviting us to the banquet of life. We have to choose to come clothed in God's banquet robe or not. God's robe is a way of being in the world; a way of thinking about the things Paul listed and embodying them in our daily living.

When we struggle with life, we can choose to be miserable or we can, "by prayer and supplication", let our desires be made known to God, who promises to support and help us in our need. This does not necessarily take away our sorrows, sadness, fear, or misery, but it can and often does

lighten the load, reminds us we are not alone, offers us comfort, and strengthens our resolve.

What I am talking about is a mindset, a type of positive thinking. Such mindfulness comes easier for some than for others. I am convinced, though, that such a mindset can be learned, when consciously practiced. Each morning we have to decide, whether or not we want to put on the banquet robe, whether or not we will try to be the face of Jesus for each person we encounter.

As I say each Sunday, at the beginning of worship, we are practicing our welcome here in church that we might be practiced in welcoming others in God's name outside of our church family. So too we come to learn about and be challenged by the Way of Jesus here in worship and with our faith family, so that we might better practice following in the Way of Jesus in all the other parts of our life.

Will this end all the hatred and violence? I really don't know. It is none of my business. I have to let go, put on the banquet robe following the example of Jesus and Paul, and trust that God, working in and through us, will give us peace.

There are many benefits to putting on the banquet robe, to following the Way of Jesus. Fullness of life being the

greatest benefit. According to Paul, when we do remember and follow the Way, then our hearts will overflow and “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

When we regularly put on the banquet robe, meeting the world as followers of Jesus Christ, we will know exactly why Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” For surely our hearts will overflow with the love of God.

So it is my hope that each one of us will earnestly seek to practice putting on the banquet robe, for that is how we, and the world will be transformed. Amen.