

Sermon Pentecost 18
Matthew 22:1-14, Psalm 106, Philippians 4:1-9
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Today Jesus tells us a parable about a wedding banquet. For reasons known only to the author of the gospel, this telling is overlaid and overloaded with excessive violence. On the other hand, Luke's gospel contains this same parable in a version suitable for all ages. I hope Luke's telling is closer to the one Jesus told.

Thinking of weddings for a moment, many of you were either married here, your children were married here or you've attended weddings of friends here. There's no doubt that this is a beautiful setting for a wedding. Rarely does anyone walk in here for the first time and not comment on how lovely this place is. I hope you would agree that all our facilities and grounds are quite well kept.

Keeping the buildings and grounds in their present condition for our use plus the utilities cost \$75,000 a year, nearly 20 percent of the overall budget. In addition, we still owe ourselves more than \$79,000 for our new heating system. Fortunately, we have been able to absorb that cost from other sources, and the vestry intends to settle that debt with money from the eventual sale of our condo at Fort Hayes.

Our theme for the every member canvass this year is **Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow**. Our buildings and surrounding properties are one of our most valuable and essential blessings, after all of you, of course. They give us a place to gather for worship, learning, meeting, planning, meditating, ministering, eating, playing, exercising, baptizing, marrying, confirming and burying. (Bless aministrals)

Jill, our secretary, made a list of outside groups that use our facilities. Some meet every week like Alcoholics Anonymous and the Tri-Cities Band. Others meet several times a year, like garden clubs and diocesan boards. And eight more meet just once a year such as the piano recital, a family reunion or a local swim club board. For the first time this past summer, we hosted a weeklong art camp for 40 military children.

While we take these facilities for granted, every year our vestry pinches limited dollars and invariably overspends the properties maintenance budget line item. Unanticipated problems occur annually, whether it is dead trees that need to be removed, old water pipes that leak or burst, a roof that leaks from cracking or detaching slate or AC units held together with bailing wire and duct tape that need to be replaced. While many of God's blessings are free, many others are not. It takes the responsibility and generosity of all of us to keep and maintain what we have here.

While we do have a relatively small endowment fund which earns invaluable dollars in interest on the principal investment, it isn't nearly enough to balance the budget. It can only supplement our pledges.

I hope you will agree that considering just our gorgeous sanctuary and well-appointed offices, parish hall, kitchen, meeting rooms and grounds, the return on your financial investment in our church is manifold. When we sing the doxology – *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* – we can really mean it.

At the end of our gospel lesson today, we hear the odd little story about a man who fails to wear the proper attire at the wedding banquet. When questioned why he is lacking a wedding robe, we are told, he is speechless. He comes across as clueless about the significance of the unique occasion which he is privileged to attend – the King's son's wedding. Everyone else is in celebratory mode. They know that they were not initially invited to such a royal occasion and feast. They have more reason to be joyful and thankful because they didn't plan nor imagine that they would be in the great hall with the king and his son and his bride.

Last weekend we were in Wilmington, N.C. I was officiating at the wedding of a close Peace Corps friend of our son John. It was a splendid occasion but made all the more so when at the reception Juanita and I were seated at the same table as the bride and groom. In fact, we were the only non-young people at the small table of nine. It was such a surprise, an honor and unexpected treat to sit and talk with the newlyweds when they weren't visiting with the many other guests.

I'm pretty sure Juanita and I felt especially blessed like all the wedding guests at the banquet in our parable today except the man without the robe. He didn't appreciate how fortunate he was and, therefore, he was uninvited.

In the New Testament letter to the Colossians, the author tells us what Christians are to wear. Put on the new nature, put on compassion, kindness, meekness, patience, forgiveness and, most of all, put on love. Elsewhere, we're told to "put on Christ." In the letter to the Philippians, St. Paul as much as says we are to put on joy as well, when he writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say Rejoice."

The sad little man without the wedding robe is a man without joy and gratitude. He doesn't know how very blessed he is. For whatever reason, he can't join in the celebration of his good fortune. He is in the right place but without the right attitude.

The story is told of a man who woke up one morning to find he only had three strands of hair on his head. He said to himself, "I guess I'll braid them," and then went happily on his way to work. The following morning he woke up to find he had only two strands. He was equally

content to part his hair down the middle. The next day he woke to find he had only one remaining strand. He smiled into the mirror as he did a comb over. Finally, he woke to find that all his hair was gone and he was completely bald. He said, "Thank God, now I don't have to spend all that time fixing my hair every morning!" Attitude is everything, isn't it?

Are we like the wedding guest who has the wrong attitude and can't celebrate his blessings or the guests who know they have received a great gift and show it with jubilant song, dance and feasting. To put on Christ is to be a cheerful and thankful giver as best we can.

You may have heard it said, "Give until it hurts." Even better, give until it feels good. AMEN.