The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 11, 2026
Isaiah 25:1-9, Psalm 23, Philippians 4:1-9,
Matthew 22:1-14

Clothing Our Hearts for the Banquet

Good morning! In our Collect of the Day, we pray that God's grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a reminder that the goodness of God surrounds us, and there is nowhere we can go where God is not with us. In Psalm 139:5-6, we read: "You hem me in, behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it." Through the Holy Spirit, the God of all goodness invites us to bear the fruit of life in Christ.

I find this collect particularly apt when reflecting on our Scripture readings for today. First, we hear that God goes before and after us, guards us in his love, shelters us, shepherds us, and brings us to the banquet table where we are offered everlasting life. Next, we learn what living in the Kingdom of God requires of us—trust, rejoicing in God, thanksgiving, gratitude, treating our neighbors with grace and

compassion. Finally, we are challenged to consider how we will respond to God's invitation to the wedding banquet. Will we indeed have the proper wedding robe?

In Psalm 23, we find that God does indeed go before us, leading us to the abundance and delight of the verdant pastures, the tranquil waters, the pathways that lead to righteousness and peace. The Holy One, the shepherd, is there to tenderly guide us, to watch after us when the path inevitably becomes perilous, precipitous, narrow, and filled with shadows. Sometimes our Shepherd is behind us, sometimes before us. We can't skirt around the danger; we must walk through it, but we don't have to do it alone. And once the path opens again before us in safety, God hosts us in a banquet of thanksgiving, where our cups do indeed "run over" and we know, through all the seasons of our lives, that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Second, we learn what is asked of us to truly dwell in the Kingdom of God. In the lesson from Isaiah 25, the people of Israel are under threat of exile and death from the Assyrian conquest. And yet, the prophet brings hope of restoration and refuge where a rich feast will be

prepared for them, and best of all, God will destroy the shroud of death and the dread it casts over people. And God will wipe away tears of sorrow from all faces. We, in turn, must wait for the Lord, not despair, remember to praise God in all things. We are to delight in God's salvation!

The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Philippi, imprisoned and facing the likelihood of death, is still able to ask them to "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!" Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. He doesn't say, "rejoice in the Lord sometimes, when thing are going well, but rejoice **always.** It doesn't ask us to rejoice for terrible things that happen, but to rejoice **in** them as in the midst of, trusting in the assurance that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ. In the final blessing after our liturgy, the priest says, "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, we can trust in God's goodness. We are to let gentleness, graciousness, and tender respect for

the humanity of our neighbors guide our life in community—in the Church and beyond. We are to nourish our souls with the bread that lasts, what is true, what inspires kindness, patience, self-control, peace, and gladness. There is much out there that presents itself as bread, which promises power, quick gratification, popularity, etc., but ultimately leaves us feeling alone, confused, and empty. We are to think about the things that open our souls to wonder, beauty, courage, compassion, and produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

And finally, we come to the Gospel account of the wedding banquet. How will we respond? A bit of background information on this passage might be helpful. At this point in the narrative, Jesus has already arrived in Jerusalem and the time of his passion and death is quickly approaching. This story is the last of three stories that were told in judgment of the actions of the religious authorities. The first was the story of the two sons asked to work in the vineyard; one said he would not work but later changed his mind and went, while the other promised to work and never showed up. Jesus then commented that tax collectors and prostitutes would go into the Kingdom of God before them. They

were not pleased! Then last week we had the story of the tenant of the vineyard killing the son of the landowner, and the stone the builder rejected becoming the cornerstone. Today we have the story of the king giving a wedding banquet for his son, enthusiastically inviting everyone he knows to come and join the celebration. Despite the pleas from the king asking them to come, many refused, some going to their farms, others to their businesses, and some even going so far as to seize the King's slaves and kill them! These people were destroyed and their city burned and the King promptly ordered his servants to go out into the streets and bring in everyone they found, a mixture of the good and the bad, to share in the banquet. One was found without a wedding robe and was cast out of the banquet hall into the darkness.

So here, Jesus is judging the motivations of the religious leaders of his time, who followed the letter of the law, but failed to show the love and compassion for their neighbors that is one of the greatest commandments of them all, the heart of the law and the prophets. They seek to lay burdens on the people and find ways to exclude them from the common life rather than showing them the great hospitality of our

God. It is also likely that Matthew is applying these words to the situation in his own community, 50 years later, where there were conflicts in the synagogue between those who believed Jesus was the Messiah and those who didn't. And to be clear, disagreements and quarrels between fellow Jews in the first century are in no way meant to impute blame or judgment on Jewish people in our own day!

So, back to the question of how we will respond to the invitation to the wedding banquet? What is the "wedding robe" that Jesus mentions? Well, I can say that we will not be denied entrance into this feast because we are not appropriately attired, or because we have doubts around some of the doctrines of the Church, or we fall into sin and have our times wandering, or running from God. That's not it. What matters is not outward appearance, or inner failures, but how we clothe our hearts! How we clothe our hearts! Will we turn down the invitation because we feel we can't possibly be worthy to share in the wedding banquet? Will we draw back from coming to the banquet because the cost is too high, requiring everything that is in us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and our neighbors as ourselves? Will we just turn away in apathy,

or indifference? Or will let our hunger for meaning, purpose, for connection, draw us to the feast, the shepherd, the host, the Lord? Will we come in all of our brokenness, fear, mistrust, doubt, and approach with faith and humility, and look up and see the face of our salvation? Will we clothe our hearts with gratitude, joy and hope and see in our neighbor the image and glory of God? Will we dare to clothe our hearts with the love of Christ? If we trust in his grace, we can be assured we will not be found wanting and will be welcomed to taste the banquet of the Lord, the feast of joy and gladness. Amen.