20th Sunday after Trinity
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Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 22: 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

MANY CALLED; FEW CHOSEN

There is one thing which ought to be settled without a doubt in every person's mind - and that is the answer to the question: Am I a child of God? When the scenes of this present world shall forever close upon me - What then? Will heaven and a blessed eternity be mine, or not? Again and again the Holy Scriptures speak about heaven - that glorious Kingdom which ultimately shall reach its climax when the King of Glory shall descend with a shout to judge both the quick and the dead and gather His beloved children around Him for an eternity of blessedness and joy. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But the Bible also teaches that no one shall become a resident of that celestial city who has not been a subject within its borders here ~~beneath~~ on earth, that none shall enter the precincts of that glorious Temple on high whose feet have not trodden the courtyards of His Temple ~~on earth~~ here below, and that no one need expect to be a partaker of the Kingdom of glory and bliss hereafter who was a stranger to Christ's Kingdom ~~below~~ here.

In the face of such a delightful, blessed prospect of eternal happiness, the question comes streaking in upon us: Why is it that few are chosen, that comparitively few enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Is it God's fault? Has He called only a few? Or whose fault is it?

Jesus answers the question for us in the Gospel lesson for today, the parable of The Marriage of the King's Son. It is evident from the parable that the invitation to come to the marriage feast went out to all. The call into God's Kingdom is universal. It goes out to every kind and sort and condition of men. This fact is made even more apparent as we search the Sacred Record. Those were called to whom Noah, the preacher of righteousness, proclaimed the mercies and terrors of Jehovah. Those were called to whom the question was put by Elijah the Tishbite: How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him. Those were called to whom the Word of the Lord came

through the prophet Isaiah: Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Those were called to whom the Forerunner, John the Baptist, came preaching in the wilderness and saying, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Those were called to whom the Lord Jesus said: Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Those were called to whom Simon Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost: Repent ye and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized in His name. Those were called to whom, as he stood on top of Mars Hill, St. Paul spoke and said: Ye men of Athens, the Unknown God whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.

And since then, throughout the centuries, the call has gone forth. Along the marshy coast and by the blue lakes of Africa, along the banks of the yellow Ganges, among the Chinese and the Japanese, among the people living in the snow and ice of the North as well as in the beautiful isles of the South, to the civilized and cultured and to the ignorant and degenerated - to all this call is being sent forth. And thank God the call is waxing louder and louder as the time grows near that the trumpet of the archangel shall sound for the final ingathering. Around the world - and also to you and to me - the call has sounded and resounded as a mighty host of pastors, missionaries, and Christians have proclaimed the invitation: Come unto the marriage!

We note that in the parable it was to a wedding feast that the guests were bidden. That of course is figurative. It is not material food that is offered in the call, but spiritual food - food for the soul. For man's soul needs food as well as his body. In fact, all eternity depends on the nourishment he consumes for his soul. And what an array of the choicest food God has set before us here in this, His divinely instituted banqueting hall, the Church! We find among the various dishes such things as these - the pardon of men's sin, all their sins, no matter how many or how great, through the cleansing blood of Calvary's Cross; the acceptance into the family of God through Holy Baptism; the supply of divine

strength to overcome temptation; the access to the throne of grace in prayer; the blessedness and comfort of the Lord's Supper; the great and precious promises that tell us of eternal life - all that the soul needs both for time and for eternity God has graciously provided. Naturally we would suppose that all would respond to the invitation to come to such a banquet. Yet we read that while many are called, only few are chosen. Why is it? Why are not all chosen?

To that question some have said that God has elected only a few ahd that you can do and conduct yourself as you please - if you do not belong to the few that God in all eternity has elected to salvation, it avails you nothing and you will not be saved. All Scripture rises up in protest to such thinking. God shuts the door to no one. He decrees no one to everlasting condemnation. He would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

The parable gives us the right answer as to why only few are chosen. When the King sent out his servants to call those who were bidden to the wedding, they would not - they were unwilling to come. Their minds and hearts were set against it. They would have nothing to do with the banquet. We all have met such people. They have no use for Christ or His Church.

When the servants were sent out a second time and gave their invitation, there were some who were totally indifferent to it. They made light of it, and went their ways - one to his farm and another to his merchandise. Such are the people - also in our day - who have so many things to attend to that they cannot find time to come and refresh themselves with the sustaining, nourishing food of God's banquet table. They make light of attending Church, hearing God's Word, partaking of the blessed sacrament.

Again, mention is made of those who took the servants whom the king had sent and spitefully entreated them and slew them. They revealed their ill will to the degree of murdering the king's messengers. Such persecution is by no means a thing of the past. There are still those who would raise murderous hands or at least blasphemous tongues against the messengers of the Christ.

Finally, we read of one who presumed to enter into the banquet hall with-

out the wedding garment which was graciously offered to him at the door. He supposed that his own personal appearance was good enough. Here we have a picture of the self-righteous, those who think themselves quite good enough. They have no use for Christ's work of redemption, His blood and righteousness - the spotless garment which must cover each of us if we are to be admitted into the Kingdom of heaven and stand in the presence of the Lord. They see no reason for humbly and penitently bending their knees before God, confessing their sins, and with believing hearts accepting Jesus as their only Savior from sin. They are good enough the way they are!

If then, from the many we take away the unwilling, the indifferent, the persecutors, and the self-righteous, how many remain? Must we not answer with our text: Few, comparatively few?

The poem story of The Grand Inquisitor presents Christ in an impressive manner. In a time of fearful persecution Christ's people are suffering terribly. Suddenly Christ appears among them, and they flock to Him in great numbers with all their sorrows. Once more He heals those that are afflicted, giving healthy bodies to the diseased, sight to the blind, life to a dead girl. His people are overjoyed that their Lord is once more visibly with them. But the Grand Inquisitor is watching and scowling. He bellows an order to the guard as he points to Christ: Arrest that man! That night Christ is not alone in His prison cell. The Grand Inquisitor has come with his flickering lantern. He has brought with him all his wild fanaticism. Heartlessly he upbraids the gentle Christ for reappearing. Violently he denounces Him. At last his anger explodes in a vehement threat and sentence of death. Christ has not spoken one word. Now He steps slowly to the side of the violent Inquisitor. . . and kisses him. The Inquisitor begins to tremble. His eyes stare madly at Christ as he throws open the prison door and screams: Go and come no more! Come not at all, never, never! Christ goes out into the darkness of the night.

It's only a story, I know. But that's just like Christ all right. And

the Inquisitor is so much like humanity. For nineteen hundred years Christ's invitations has gone out. Come to the marriage! Come to Me - no matter who you are no matter what you've done - and I will give you rest - in Me you'll find security and peace forever. If only more had listened, we would not have this kind of world on our hands. Someday a stupid world will recognize the blunder of the ages: its failure to take Christ seriously and come as He has invited.

I pray God that no one here refuses to accept the Savior's gracious invitation. I pray God that by His grace all of you will by faith adorn yourself with the wedding garment of Christ's perfection - won for you in blood and sweat and tears on the accursed tree - and so enter into glory everlasting. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved - so states the infallible Word. Jesus saves! Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. And how does Jesus save? He Himself tells us: If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed. Thus continuing in His Word - hearing it gladly, studying it, meditating upon it - you'll find yourself on your knees declaring in rapt devotion: Jesus, my Savior, I love You! I trust you with all my life for time and for eternity. And then the question will rise to your lips: What do You want me to do? Christ will then be to you more than a pious expression. He'll be a living reality. Then we'll do more than confess Him. We'll dedicate our lives to Him.

Amen.