

# **INVITED TO BELONG**

## **Matthew 22:1-14**

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**August 23, 2009**

**PURPOSE** - To give a vision for the tables to which we invite others – so that we care to prepare and invite others to those tables

**MAIN IDEA** – The tables of the kingdom are wedding banquet tables, based in the love of the Father for His Son, celebrating the bride He has taken to himself – to these we invite others to belong in celebration!

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Our Scripture lesson this morning comes from Matthew 22 – so you can open your Bibles to that passage.

But before we read that Scripture, I want to draw your attention to today's bulletin insert, "Peace's Roadmap for the Future".

(i) Do you remember those olden days – before GPS systems; before Mapquest, Yahoo – there were these things called ROADMAPS?

A. Roadmaps help you know where you're going (maybe you yet used one on vacation this summer)

B. Roadmaps mark out a direction ... toward a destination

2. THIS IS PEACE CHURCH'S ROADMAP for the future.

You may be wondering: Where is this church heading?

Whether you're a long-timer or a guest today ... This is your answer.

(i) The directions described in this Roadmap are the fruit of a Strategic Plan, developed by a group of people, with input from many, endorsed by Council It took a year and a half to develop.

- Last fall we began to implement this plan

(ii) Inside the pamphlet you'll see 5 major DIRECTIONS described.

- A. Becoming a Multi-cultural ministry – by combining with an African-American congregation
- B. Becoming More Relationally Connected & Assimilating – through small groups / weekly family night
- C. Becoming More Creative & Hospitable in our Sunday morning worship gathering
- D. Becoming More Prayerful - corporately
- E. Becoming More Effectively Led & Equipped

(iii) WHY? Why make such change to our ministry?

(Back) – ... because ... As a church, it's our MISSION to proclaim good news, nurture God's people, go to the world ... And we believe that God has called us to carry out that mission here in South Holland, working to become more of a community church, emphasizing the power of prayer.

(iv) So that's WHERE we're headed ... and WHY ... now WHAT do we HOPE TO SEE, as we travel along this road? Our VISION is that Peace will be a place where everyone is:

INVITED TO BELONG AT THE FAMILY TABLE

ENCOURAGED TO GROW IN CHRIST

EMPOWERED TO SERVE CHRIST'S KINGDOM

A. Those 3 statements are the focus of my next 3 message, using 3 parables of Jesus, as we prepare to enter a new church program year.

B. Our vision is to become a church that is INVITATIONAL, ENCOURAGING & EMPOWERING

- It's a relational vision of the church – The church will always be VERTICAL = praising God, listening to His Word. Prayer is a vertical dimension in this vision. But it's focus is largely HORIZONTAL – to become a place where PEOPLE are met, welcomed, embraced, encouraged, equipped – for the glory of God.

(v) HOW, then, are we ever going to do this?

We can't!

(Brochure) *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”* – God said to Zerubbabel through Zechariah when he had to rebuild the temple.

*“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”* – God says to us.

The Spirit of God living in us ALONE accomplishes this work. He is the ENGINE for our travels. We need to seek Him in all the ways He fills our life.

3. One major way is through THE written WORD OF GOD – read & reflected on.

So let's look at this Matthew 22 passage, keeping in mind the vision of the church as a place where everyone is INVITED TO BELONG AT THE FAMILY TABLE.

***Read Matthew 22:1-14***

## **II. THE KINGDOM**

Christianity is an invitational life – that begins with God and extends to others through us.

So let's first be clear just WHAT God invites us to be part of.

1. The parable is about THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – that's what we're invited to!

- Not Peace Church ... not our denomination – the Christian Reformed Church ... not even our lives as individuals & families. Those are only channels & expressions of the kingdom.

(i) The kingdom is a REIGN of God in Spirit & Truth through relationship with Jesus – knowing & listening to Him. It brings HEAVEN on earth: to bring forgiveness, healing & direction. It is heaven's goodness (shalom) begun today!

God is real. He is present. He does REIGN in our life – through Jesus - personally, directly, in spirit & truth. That's the Kingdom we're invited into.

2. The HEART of this kingdom is a celebration of love. That's what the image of the WEDDING BANQUET reminds us of.

*V. 2 - The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.*

LET M DISTINGUISH 3 LOVES IN THAT STATEMENT:

(i) First, the love of the Son for His bride.

= that's the Church! The Son has PLEDGED HIMSELF to the church. The Son has given up his life for the bride. The son has not held our shortcomings against us. He loves a marred bride – willing to die to purify us!

(Ladies, that's the type of man you want to be united)

So His church is united to Him in covenant relationship

(ii) Now the Father-King is proud of His Son for this love. He rejoices. He wants to honor the Son. So he prepares a banquet for him - because HE LOVES HIM. That's a second love in this feast!

= the love of the Father for the Son – that love too is our salvation!

A. John the Baptist said in Jn. 3:35 – *“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

A. To be saved is to acknowledge & put ourselves in the love of the Father for the Son

To be saved is to recognize that my DIRECT love relationship with the Father has been DAMAGED BY SIN. It’s broken. By nature, I’m indifferent to God. I fail Him. I deny Him. I cannot deserve His love. In fact, his anger (wrath) rests on me.

But there is ONE WHO DOES! – Jesus, the Son of God & Man! The Father loves Him. He loves him for his OBEDIENCE, his HUMILITY, his SACRIFICE. The Father has loved the Son FROM ETERNITY PAST and will into ETERNITY FUTURE.

That love came to earth so that we could be saved by putting ourselves into it  
=IN CHRIST = covenanted / united / His will is mine

*“He who believes in the Son of God – as the beloved of God – has eternal life.*

*Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

B. When we put ourselves in that love, we claim by faith, “I am as loved of God, as Jesus Himself.”

He was THE SON. I am A SON, A DAUGHTER, A CHILD of God.

I.e. – When God said at Jesus’ baptism, “You are my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” ... those words are now mine – because I am UNITED to Christ.

(Sure, I still fail God – but when I repent, God does not hold my sins against me – I’m his – he is well-pleased with me)

I could never merit those words on my own, but Jesus opens his arms to me & invites me into the eternal love of the Father for the Son.

(iii) THIRD - when, through repentance & faith, I put myself in Christ, then also the LOVE OF THE SON FOR THE FATHER is BORN IN ME. His obedience is born in my heart. His love for the Father lives in me.

A. The Holy Spirit is the DYNAMIC of this love. He’s the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity.

He makes real the love of the Son for the Father by glorifying Jesus – teaching us His ways.

He makes real the love of the Father for the Son – by assuring us in our fears that we are loved UNCONDITIONALLY.

Rom. 8:14 – *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘ABBA, FATHER’.*

The eternal love of the TRINITY – Father, Son & Spirit – has come to earth (hands) & opened up IN JESUS for us to enter! That’s SALVATION! That’s the KINGDOM!

A. Are you in the love of the Father for the Son & the Son for the Father?

Can you identify it?

That love completely changes your life. You will be born again.

If you do not know that love, turn to Christ today & UNITE with him.

*“He who rejects the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God remains on him.”*

3. the Kingdom is a CELEBRATION OF LOVE – so it is a WEDDING BANQUET.

This is an IMAGE for life in church & the Christian home – A WEDDING BANQUET!

(i) Remember yours? (for those married) ... the FOOD, the DANCING, the JOY!

I remember my Beppe – was about 80 years old – and was the hit of the dance floor! – doing the Hokey-Pokey, the YMCA(?) – speeches, food, fellowship

We had a wonderful wedding banquet – it was so much fun!

... cause we were celebrating COVENANT LOVE!

KINGDOM LIFE IS A WEDDING BANQUET!

(ii) It’s an image to LIVE UP TO / TO LIVE OUT when we gather as the church.

A. IN WORSHIP - We miss the mark if we think that worship is about music, words, liturgy – doing everything “properly”.

- Sure, you want to have good music & “speeches”, skits – that’s important in any wedding banquet – but it’s all about LOVE EXPRESSED in joy! That’s our GOAL!

B. We can’t lose this image in all the directions we are headed. The church is a celebration of love. Growing toward the image of a wedding banquet, makes us an invitation simply in WHO WE ARE!

I appreciated these comments from Bruce Goette in my research this week: *“The church misrepresents the kingdom when we focus on sin rather than grace; when we judge more than embrace, when we mourn more than we celebrate; when we are sober more than we laugh.”*

(iii) Banquets too are about FOOD – which ties into our vision statement: *Invited to belong at the family table.*

This is a vision for our TABLE LIFE, at home and at church - the wedding banquet.

A. It begins with THIS TABLE (communion)

Here we remember that the calf was fattened (Jesus completed obedience for us as fully human), then slaughtered that we might be forgiven & reconciled to God – and one another.

In their INVITATION, the King tells his servants to say::

- *“COME to the banquet ... EVERYTHING IS READY!”*

A. Many times I use that line after I’ve set the table here (communion table) – In Jesus’ death & resurrection, “everything is ready”:

- The love of God is fully known (there can be no more or higher expressions of it)
- AND the will of God is fully available – Jesus lived full obedience unto death on the Cross – by His Word & Spirit He makes it known to us. ... EVERYTHING IS READY!

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B. The wedding banquet is an IMAGE for table life in our fellowship hall (MOPS / family night) and HOMES

WHAT HAPPENS at the table of a wedding banquet?

- You meet people
- You sit together
- You eat together
- The time is sacred. The food is sacred.
- You converse
- You talk about the love of the bride & groom

A Kingdom Table CELEBRATES the love of the Father & Son. It is a table that exalts Jesus

Our vision is to become a place where people are invited to belong at the Family Table – because these are all expressions of the King’s WEDDING BANQUET TABLE! ... a place to meet Jesus

### III. RESPONSE

1. Well, the first group of people the King's servants go to are those who had already received an invitation.

- They had a 2-INVITATION system back then for wedding banquets – they received the earlier invitation (like we do, but no RSVP) ... and then when the meal was ready, the follow-up personal invitation. (Sort of like inviting guests over to dinner. They come to your home at 5:00, sit around for a bit while the meal is being prepared in its final stages, then you give that second invitation – OK – let's sit around the table to eat!)

The first group of people are the already invited – and they REJECT the King's invitation.

(i) By this, Jesus clearly meant the Jewish people of his day & their religious leaders in particular.

They had been told that God's saving love would be coming on earth. Their prophets had extended that invitation. They received it. They knew it. But when that love in Christ Jesus personally came, largely they rejected it.

A. In our day, this first group are those of us who've been baptized & grown up in church. Like the Jews, we are children of the covenant.

But baptism does not save us. Jesus saves us. We must know Him personally.

In our baptism, we are promised by God that He will come and make Jesus known to us personally. That's the invitation we've received.

BUT WHEN JESUS COMES WILL WE RECEIVE HIM?

WILL WE GIVE OUR HEARTS TO THAT LOVE?

(ii) The hearts of the first group of those invited were actually elsewhere:

- They were interested more in their field or business
  - Maybe they still went to church, but the joy of their life was not Jesus
- Maybe it was sports, their house, career, their car

There are many things that can capture our heart above God's love.

2. This is a WARNING TO US!

Is the kingdom of God's love your delight?

Just because you've been baptized, it doesn't mean you're there! That's only the primary invitation. You must PERSONALLY embrace Jesus as the deepest, FIRST love in your life!

- (i) For those who reject the King's invitation, there are severe consequences.  
He sends his army and destroys those who reject him.

A. For it is the KING ALMIGHTY who gives it. It is SACRED!

If President Obama gave you an invitation to the future wedding of one of his daughters, you'd take it seriously! God is to be taken more seriously!

B. Not only that, their excuses were an insult!

Business, fields can be tended to at any time ... NOW is the invitation. Now is the moment! What an insult it is to put anything above the invitation of God's love.

DESTRUCTION AWAITS THOSE WHO DO SO

3. So the King's servants are sent to a SECOND GROUP of people:

– ANYONE WHO WILL COME (v. 9)

Our vision is to be a place where EVERYONE will be invited to belong at the Family table.

- (i) First, Jesus was sent to those who were in formal covenant relationship with God (not personal) – just like we too should invite one another to our tables first.

But should that not bear fruit, go out to anyone who will come to our family tables.

A. That is God's plan:

The rest of the world is now included in the Kingdom, not only the Jews!

- (ii) In Luke's version of this parable, those who are invited are the "poor, crippled, lame and blind". They are those who know they need the love of God.

They hunger for Jesus. They're not bored by it.

They are the ones we want to invite – anyone who God puts on our path!

Just as the King invites you today to come to Jesus, he wants you to invite others to Jesus:

- Use the table of your home, or our fellowship tables, or the one in this sanctuary!

If those who are so familiar with the things of God REJECT your invitations to God's love, DON'T GIVE UP – go to the “street corners”, wherever God leads, and find people who will come and take an interest in that love.

= that's our vision

#### IV. CONCLUSION

1. The parable concludes with an odd twist. The wedding hall is filled with guests. Then the King comes to check on them and one of the guests is not properly attired.

One commentator states: *“When a great king would put on a feast, he would not only provide the invitation and all the food, but he would also provide the necessary garments to wear at the feast.”*

- (kind of like those wrist bands at theme parks!).

So this guy is TOSSED from the Kingdom – into darkness & pain (intimations of Hell).

(i) In the fullness of revelation, we understand this to refer to the garment of Jesus – HIS GOODNESS ALONE – needs to be worn / trusted in to fellowship with the King!

We worship in Jesus. We pray in Jesus. We eat in Jesus. We build families in Jesus. We build churches in Jesus.

We cannot wear any other clothing. No other clothing secures the King's blessing!

2. SO COMES THE COMMENT: *Many are invited, but few are chosen*

= Not everyone invited to belong at our family tables will be those chosen of God who trust in Christ. Only God knows that. We invite He chooses.

We're called to invite many! So many that we come to eventually see that but a few are chosen.

(i) We don't know who God will choose unto salvation, but MANY must be invited!

3. That invitation to belong is the first step for people to become the chosen of God.

That's our responsibility – open our hearts, our homes, our tables to give others a sense of belonging:

➤ “Come, you matter! – to me / to God.

People, today especially, must first BELONG ... in order then to BELIEVE & FOLLOW Jesus Christ, as His chosen.

4. You're invited to the celebration of God's love on earth

HAVE YOU COME TO HIM?

If so, let's give ourselves to invite others to belong to Him.

AMEN