

Title: “Christ Invites Us; We Receive”

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Matthew 22:8-10

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Service Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9; Phil. 4:4-13; Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus gathers us through Word and Sacrament. He calls us, feeds us, and gives us a place at His feast.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our mission is to make disciples while going but have you ever stopped to consider what that actually means? What is a disciple and how do you know if you have made one? How do you know if you are one? Over the next three weeks we are going to explore what it means to be a disciple. And this morning we are going to start with the very foundation of discipleship as we ask the most basic question: what is a disciple?

It has once been said in secular circles that we are human *beings*, not human *doings*. We *are* humans because, well, we are. We don't work to become human, we just are. The world may argue about the details of this – things like gender, but everyone agrees that we are human *beings*. Our identity is one of a human and that identity serves as the very foundation of our understanding of the world – even if we agree on little else about us. And so, as we consider what it means to be a disciple, this understanding of identity proves useful: for to speak of discipleship means to speak of identity, of *being*, not *doing*.

Now this may be obvious to you, especially if you were raised in the Lutheran church. But for some of you this might be a new concept because what it implies is that we as Christians don't work at *becoming* a disciple; we already are. So, the question is this: what is it, exactly, that we *already are*?

Jesus begins to answer this in our gospel passage today. Starting in verse 1 he says:

22 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

In this parable, Jesus teaches that his kingdom could be compared to a wedding feast for a son. The king rules a people – *his* people. Their individual vocations may attach to them other identities like farmer or entrepreneur, but their core identity is that of the king's people. Some of these have been called to the feast but they reject this invitation, and in doing so reject the identity that flows from the king.

Jesus contrasts this with the next group of people, those who also are the king's people. Picking up from verse 8:

⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰ And those

servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

These are people who, just like the first, root their identity in the king. However, the banquet was not initially for them. But because of the actions of the chosen, the king still calls and invites them in. They do not reject the invitation and therefore do not reject the identity given them through the king.

In the same way, Christians are those whose identity is connected to the king – to God the Father. Christians are those who have been called and invited into the celebration and feast of the son. Now, this begins to answer the question about discipleship but only just. For what does it mean to identify with the king? Still left unanswered is how a Christian *is* a disciple. And for that we need to run through God's story of salvation. In the beginning God created man and in those first days, man's identity was found in God. After the fall, man rejected that identity and worked to form one for himself, separate from God.

But God refused to accept this separation. He refused to lay idle as man formed his own identity because he knew that it would lead to eternal separation from him. So God sent his son to reconcile and restore our identity with him. As Jesus made his way to the cross, he clothed himself in us – taking upon himself *our sin* and *our rejection* to God. And in this way, he clothed himself in our sin. This is what we mean when we say that Jesus took upon our sin. He did it by pulling us into him, grafting us to him so that our sin became his. And then, in an act of utter mercy and grace, he carried us and our sins to the cross. Pause and consider the weight of this reality. Through Jesus, the Father has connected us to him in a way that our identity is inexpressibly linked to him. We no longer are uninvited guests who don't belong.

And through his resurrection, just as Jesus was raised from death, so too are we – because we are still connected to him. From the grave he rose, and when he did, so did we. But what do we do with this identity? We can receive it through baptism or we can reject it. We can remain connected to him or we can reject him and go our own way into the world, forging for ourselves an identity apart from him – an identity that leads to death.

So you see in this way a Christian is a disciple. Discipleship is not about what we have done but about what he, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has done *for* us. It is *all* about God's work, not ours. In this act of great mercy, Jesus has clothed himself in us so that through his resurrection we can now be clothed in him; clothed and brought into the greatest banquet feast.

Connected, called, gathered. This is what God has done. And this is what God still does. He continues to gather us through Word and Sacrament. He continues to call us, cloth us in his righteousness, feed us, and give us a place at his feast. All that is left for us to do is to live in that identity that we are in Christ and he is in us. And so the very first lesson of discipleship, the very foundation is one of identity; one of *being*, not *doing*. And so this week, take a moment to consider your identity – the identity that you have been given through baptism and the identity that you are reminded of at the Lord's table.

Next week we will continue this discussion about discipleship and how we respond to this identity given to us through Christ.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You have called us, gathered us, and made us Your own through Jesus Christ. Thank You for clothing us in His righteousness, forgiving our sins, and welcoming us to the feast of Your Son. Keep us firmly connected to Christ through Your Word and Sacraments, and teach us to live each day in the identity You have graciously given us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.